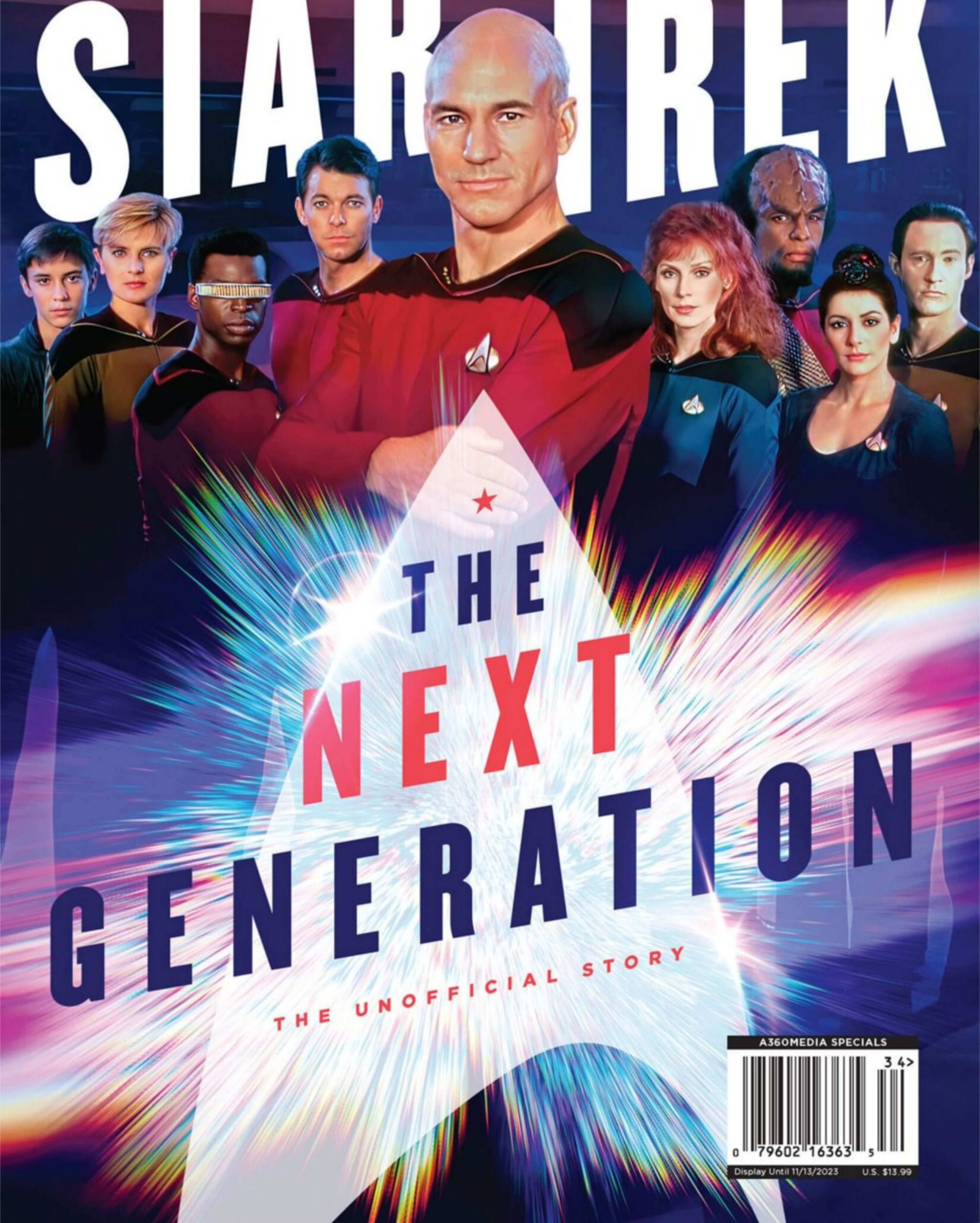


STAR TREK



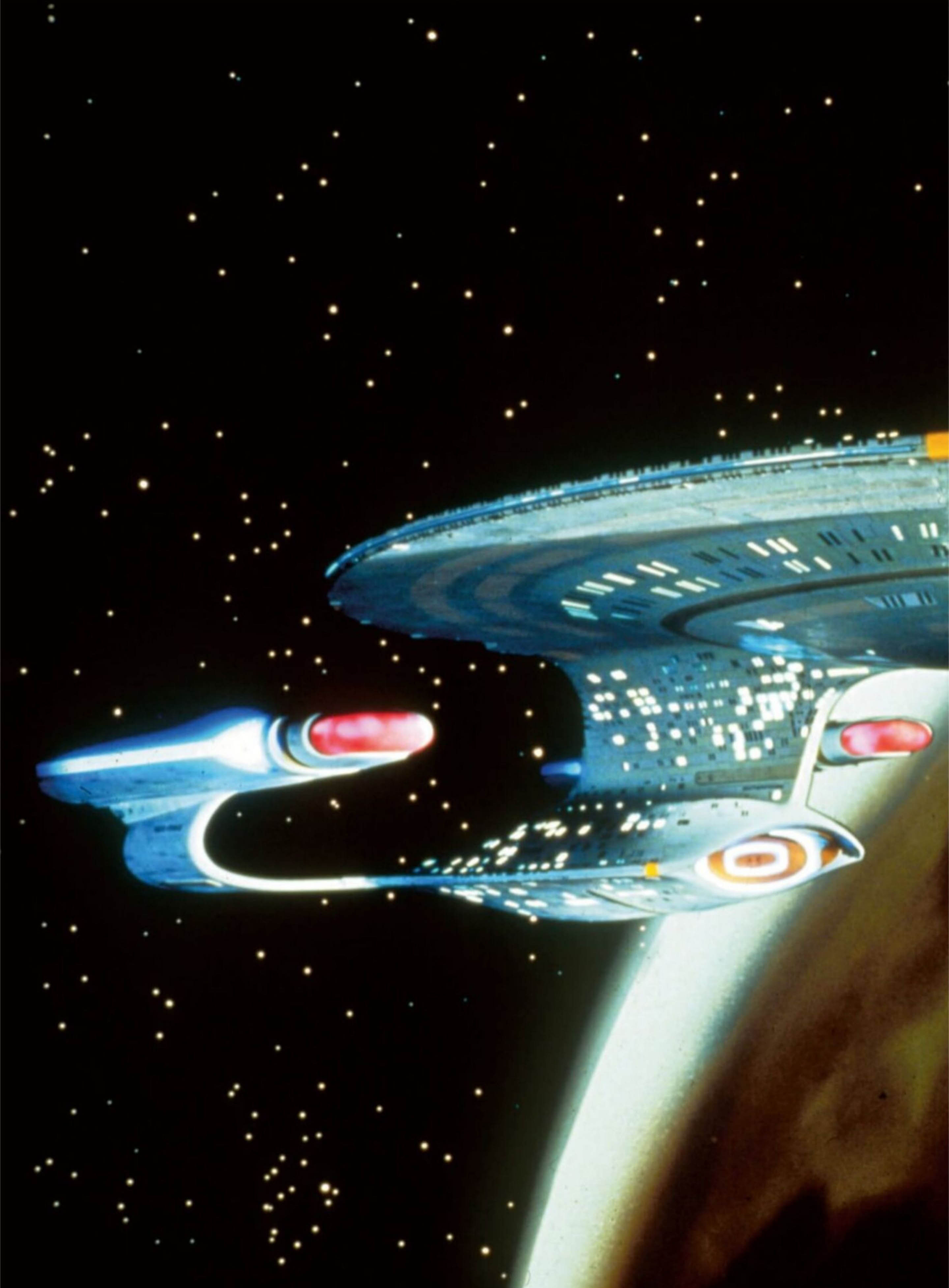
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STAR TREK

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Was *Picard* Season 3 the end for the crew—and fans—of *TNG*?



Along with Brent Spiner as Data (left) and Donna Murphy as Anij, Patrick Stewart's Capt. Jean-Luc Picard (right) pilots a raft in 1998's *Star Trek: Insurrection*.



INTRODUCTION

THE BRIDGE

TNG IS THE PIVOTAL LINK BETWEEN STAR TREK'S
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Until 1987, when anyone thought of *Star Trek*, they pictured Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Lt. Uhura and the science fiction of the 1960s—before the moon landing. The movies had modernized things a little (especially *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*) but the cult status of the original 1966–69 TV series, complete with Scotty beaming up the crew members, was still so powerful that it defined the *Trek* phenomenon. There was no true franchise yet, because the original cast and story lines from the classic show essentially were all anyone knew.

And then, on Sept. 28, 1987, everything changed. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* warped onto syndicated TV, and suddenly the captain of the USS *Enterprise* was Jean-Luc Picard, a bald Frenchman who spoke with an English accent. He was in charge of an all-new starship *Enterprise* leading a completely different crew. The two-hour premiere episode, “Encounter at Farpoint,” was an instant hit—even if behind the scenes, the first two seasons of the show were rocky. Gradually, *The Next Generation* hit its stride, not only winning over legacy fans, but also cultivating followers of its own.

This was a show about politics, society and human beings striving to be better. Its version of the future was poignant yet optimistic, and also everything hard-core fans loved about *The Original Series*. The difference was, in the mid-1960s, *TOS* reached a

relatively small viewing audience. By the early 1990s, *TNG* had brought social-minded science fiction into the mainstream. At the height of its popularity in 1993 and '94, more than 20 million people watched the show every week, and that wasn't even counting the fans who taped it on their VCRs.

In 1994, *TNG* made history by becoming the first science fiction show to be nominated for an Emmy for best original drama. It also was the first syndicated TV program to beat several network shows in viewership. To this day, the *TNG* starship *Enterprise* has appeared on television for more hours than any other fictional spaceship has appeared in *anything*. No other reboot or remake of an existing Hollywood brand has been as successful as *TNG*. Without this series, the sci-fi renaissance of the '90s might never have happened. “We were actually a harbinger of things to come,” LeVar Burton, who played Geordi La Forge on all seven seasons of *TNG*, told *Inverse* in 2021.

Point taken. It's hard to imagine the Marvel Cinematic Universe or the *Star Wars* franchise on Disney+ without *TNG* bravely proving that pop culture mythologies can be expanded, reshaped and redefined. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* transformed Gene Roddenberry's original creation and entertainment as we know it—but it almost never happened. This is the story of a sci-fi miracle.



Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry in the 1970s, when the show was already beginning to show signs of its enduring timelessness.



CHAPTER 1

THE NEW MISSION

JUST WHEN PARAMOUNT WANTED
MORE TREK ON TV, GENE RODDENBERRY
WANTED TO RETIRE

B

Leonard Nimoy as Spock (left) and William Shatner as Capt. Kirk, in *Star Trek: The Original Series*.

Before *The Next Generation* reenergized the Final Frontier, *Star Trek* had already died and come back to life at least three times. *The Original Series* became a hit in syndication almost immediately after it had been canceled by NBC in 1969, finding a larger audience in reruns than it had ever attracted during its network run. In 1972, the first major *Star Trek* convention happened in New York City, drawing three times as many people as San Diego Comic-Con. One year later, the show was reborn as *Star Trek: The Animated Series*, though that would end in 1974. Even the successful film series, which began in 1979 with *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, actually derived from creator Gene Roddenberry's early draft of another television show, often called "Star Trek: Phase II."





Bottom right: Released in 1979, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* earned \$82.6 million at the worldwide box office.

Left: Shatner and Nimoy with (from left) director Robert Wise, Roddenberry and DeForest Kelley.

Top right: Wise directing the movie as (from left) Nimoy, Roddenberry, Kelley and Shatner look on.



And although the films delighted fans new and old, by 1986, Roddenberry was done trying to bring *Star Trek* back to TV—arguably its best medium. He'd had little creative input in the *Trek* movies after 1979, and at 65 years old he was ready to call it a career.

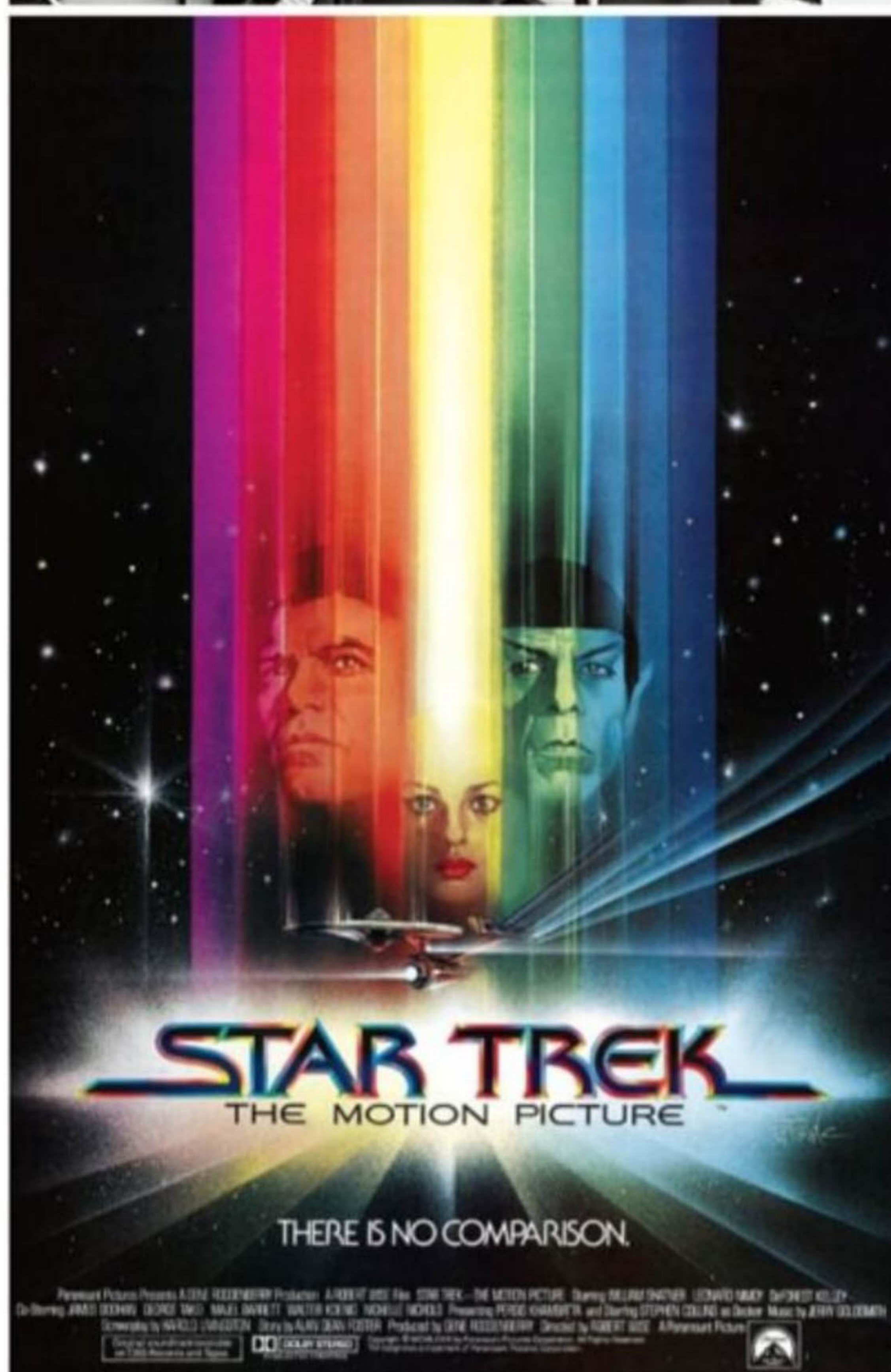
Paramount Studios had other ideas. It owned *Star Trek*—and it wanted more material to capitalize on the franchise's bankable legion of fans. Roddenberry held his ground. As he recalled to *The New York Times* in 1988, he'd told Paramount not to even bother bringing *Trek* back to TV. "No way," he said. "The first show took too much out of me."

Paramount countered by telling Roddenberry that a new show was going to be developed—with his input or without it. When the studio showed Roddenberry what it had in mind, he was none too pleased.

This version of "The Next Generation" (the subtitle was used in one scripted draft) focused on war and conflict. There was also a Vulcan captain who died in the first episode, only to return as a talking-head hologram à la Max Headroom.

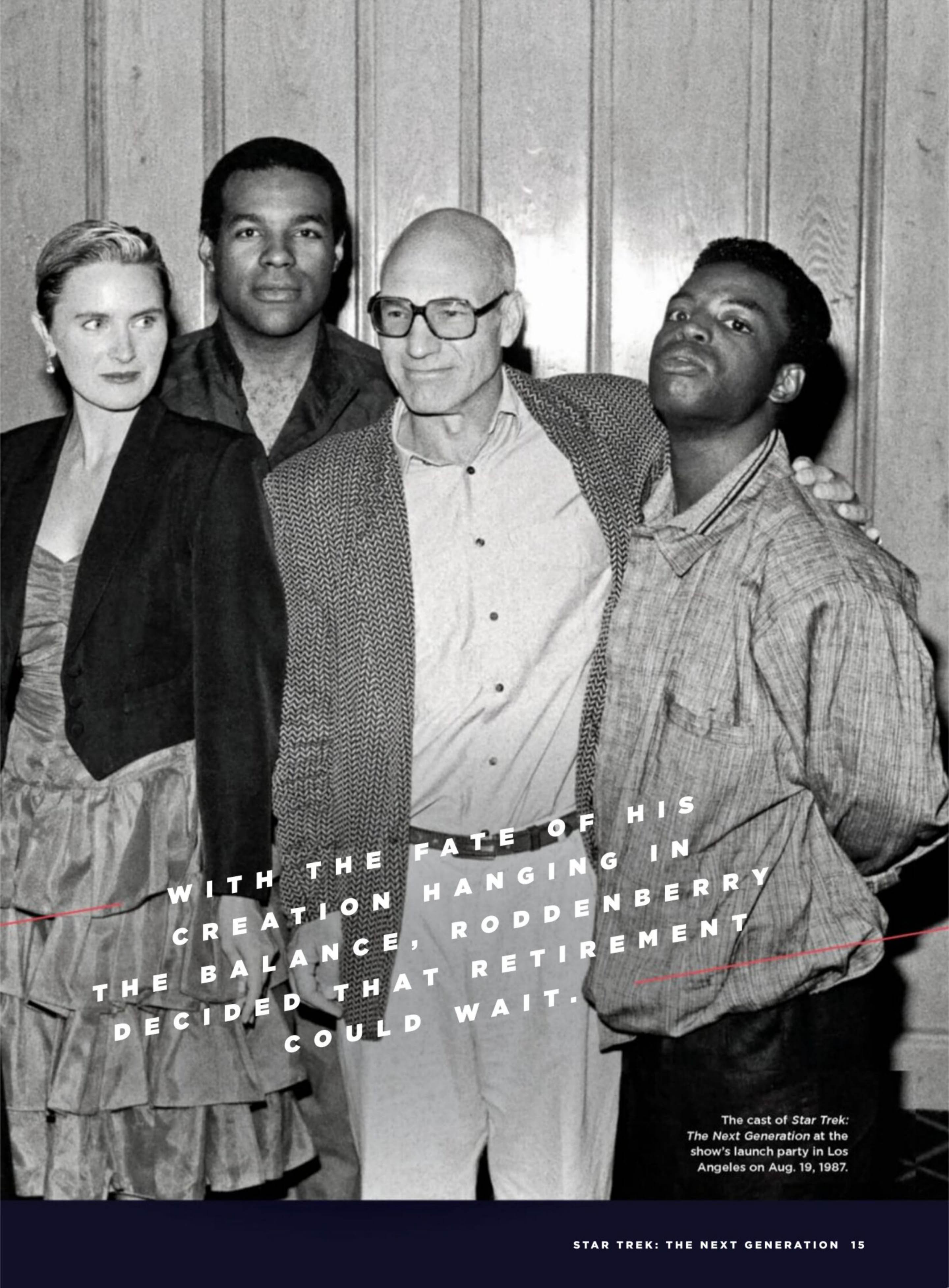
In Roddenberry's opinion, this wasn't *Star Trek*. Suddenly, with the fate of his creation hanging in the balance, he decided that retirement could wait. If there was going to be a new *Star Trek* TV series, it was going to be done *his* way.

Having already worked through ideas while developing the script for *The Motion Picture*,



CHAPTER 1





WITH THE FATE OF HIS
CREATION, HANGING IN
THE BALANCE, RODDENBERRY
DECIDED THAT RETIREMENT
COULD WAIT.

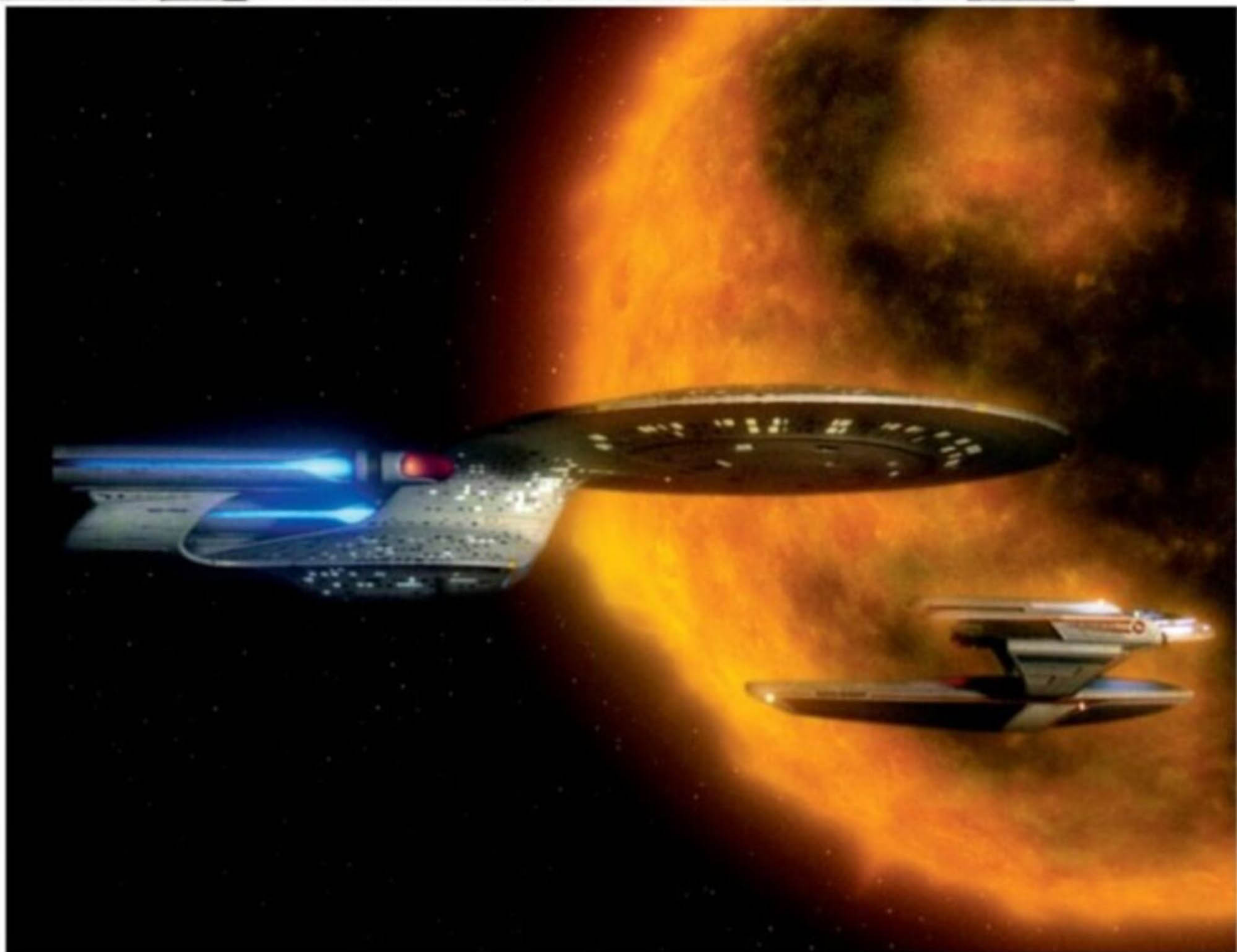
The cast of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* at the show's launch party in Los Angeles on Aug. 19, 1987.



Above: Roddenberry and actor Jonathan Frakes (right) attend the *TNG* launch party in Los Angeles in 1987.

Near right: The *Enterprise-D*, the starship commanded by Capt. Jean-Luc Picard in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Opposite page: *TNG* starred (clockwise from left) Marina Sirtis, Michael Dorn, Gates McFadden, Frakes, Brent Spiner, Patrick Stewart and LeVar Burton.



Roddenberry knew how he wanted to update the feeling and philosophy of *The Original Series*. Several characters from Phase II, including Decker and Ilia (both of whom had appeared in *The Motion Picture*) were reimagined as, respectively, Commander Riker and Counselor Troi. Another Phase II character, a Vulcan named Xon who was striving to act more like a human, was mashed together with an android from a failed Roddenberry TV pilot, *The Questor Tapes*, to become Data.

Roddenberry also brought back two of his most important writers from *The Original Series*: David Gerrold, who'd famously penned "The Trouble With Tribbles," and Dorothy "D.C." Fontana, who'd been a script editor on the classic show, and had written many fan-favorite episodes, including "This Side of Paradise" and "Journey to Babel." Although neither writer would remain after Season 1 of *The Next Generation*, much of the story of the first episode,

"Encounter at Farpoint," was created by Fontana. Roddenberry also reteamed with Robert "Bob" Justman and Edward K. Milkis, both producers on *The Original Series*.

The first episode of *The Next Generation* was only supposed to be 60 minutes. But the studio demanded that "Encounter at Farpoint" go big with a two-hour premiere. At this point, Roddenberry wrote in the character of Q, an all-powerful space god, who puts the crew on trial for all the crimes of humanity. Roddenberry's inner circle worried this wouldn't work, and that, on paper, Q was too similar to a character from an original series episode named Trelane. But, by putting Q in the script, Roddenberry set the tone for the profound humanism—and sometimes *humor*—of the entire series.

Star Trek was back, as was Gene Roddenberry—but many familiar problems would soon return as well.



CHAPTER 2

THE CAST

RECRUITING THE
RIGHT CREW FOR TNG WAS
A CHALLENGE



Lieutenant Worf (Michael Dorn) and Tasha Yar (Denise Crosby) fire their phasers on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.





One of the hardest parts of creating *Star Trek: The Original Series* was casting. Infamously, two pilots had been necessary to convince NBC to bring the series to air—and each featured not only different captains, but also different ship’s doctors (neither of whom was McCoy). In both pilots, Leonard Nimoy was present as Spock, but it took time for the actor to find his way with the character.

Perhaps with the pain of that experience in mind, Gene Roddenberry didn’t even try to replicate the triumvirate of Kirk, Spock and Bones while casting *TNG*. Roddenberry reimagined the command structure of the newest USS *Enterprise* in a different way. This time, the captain wouldn’t rush into danger, phaser at the ready. Instead, his first officer would become the action hero. For the role of William T. Riker, producers cast former soap opera star Jonathan Frakes, who, in the 1970s, had played

Jonathan Frakes poses for a portrait with castmates Crosby and Marina Sirtis in 1987.

CHAPTER 2



Left: Dorn poses for a portrait in full makeup as Lieutenant Worf, the first Klingon in Starfleet.

Top right: Marina Sirtis played Lt. Cmdr. Deanna Troi, the *Enterprise's* half-human ship's counselor.

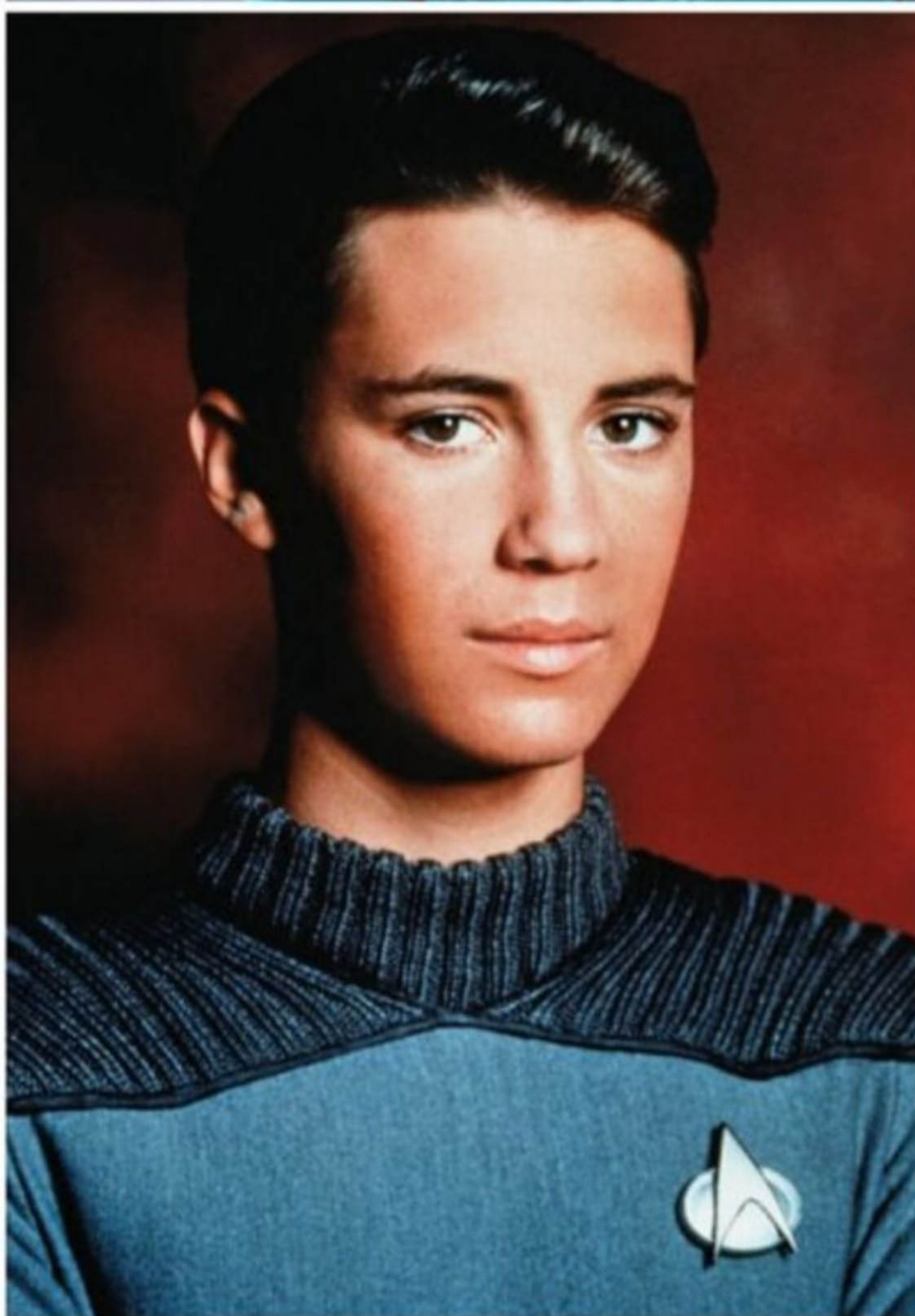
Bottom right: Perhaps the most famous cast member was Wil Wheaton, who'd been in the hit film *Stand by Me*.

Captain America for in-person appearances booked by Marvel Comics. Opposite Frakes was Marina Sirtis as half-Betazoid Deanna Troi, Riker's former love and the ship's counselor, an empath who could sense emotions but was not fully telepathic.

Sirtis had initially auditioned for the role of Tasha Yar, but was instead cast as Troi because the producers felt Denise Crosby (who had auditioned for Troi) was a better fit as Yar, the tough-as-nails security chief of the *Enterprise*. Yar was aided by Worf (Michael Dorn), the first Klingon in Starfleet. Dorn has said that Roddenberry allowed him to "create a backstory" for Worf, which included the idea that this Klingon had been raised by humans.

Gates McFadden played Dr. Beverly Crusher, the ship's doctor. Later in the series, Crusher would become known as "the dancing Doctor" in the episode "Data's Day," which was inspired by the fact that McFadden had begun her career as a choreographer, notably for the film *Labyrinth*. Crusher was joined by her son, Wesley, played by young Wil Wheaton. In 1987, Wheaton was still only a teenager, but he was already one of the most well-known actors in the cast thanks to his breakout performance in the hit film *Stand By Me*.

The role of the curious android, Data, went to Brent Spiner. A huge fan of Old Hollywood, Spiner imbued his performance with classic touches, sometimes reminiscent of Buster Keaton. Standing next to Data on the bridge in Season 1 was Geordi La Forge, the blind helmsman of the *Enterprise-D*, played by LeVar Burton. After bringing Kunta Kinte



CHAPTER 2

SOMEHOW, WHENEVER
RODDENBERRY LOOKED AT
STEWART, HE DID
NOT SEE A STARFLEET
COMMANDER.



Patrick Stewart (center),
as Capt. Jean-Luc Picard,
poses with the other
members of the *TNG* cast.



Right: Stewart's clean-shaven look was an issue for both Roddenberry and executives at Paramount.

Top left: LeVar Burton was cast as Geordi La Forge, the blind helmsman of the USS *Enterprise-D*.

Bottom left: Data, the android science officer of the *Enterprise-D*, was played by actor Brent Spiner.



to life in the groundbreaking 1977 TV miniseries *Roots*, Burton had become a familiar and friendly face for a generation of children as the host of the PBS program *Reading Rainbow*, which debuted in 1983.

For the role of Capt. Jean-Luc Picard, a number of actors were considered—including two former James Bond villains: Yaphet Kotto and Patrick Bauchau. The one actor not in the running, at least if Roddenberry had had his way, was Patrick Stewart.

It wasn't that Stewart was subpar as an actor. The classically trained stage performer had done Shakespeare and was a regular on British television, where he'd proven his abilities in a wide range of roles. But, somehow, whenever Roddenberry looked at Stewart he did not see a Starfleet commander. Instead he saw "a bald, middle-aged Englishman."

Stewart's hairline also was an issue for Paramount executives. The actor was even required to do some auditions wearing a toupée, and at least one screen test in costume with a hairpiece *after* he was cast.

Always feisty when it came to input from studio execs, Roddenberry eventually fought for the right for Stewart to go bald throughout the show, which led to further protest. Why, the studio heads wondered, would a man in the future not have a solution for baldness?

Roddenberry's response represented the entire ethos of the show he wanted to create. The question wasn't whether or not male pattern baldness could be cured, he said. More to the point is that "in the 24th century, no one will care."





CHAPTER 3

LOST IN SPACE

AFTER A STRONG PREMIERE
EPISODE, THE FIRST TWO SEASONS
OF TNG WERE A MIXED BAG

W

With tremendous buildup and publicity to drive viewership, “Encounter at Farpoint” was watched by 15.7 million Americans, according to the Nielsen ratings. But after that triumph, the voyage for *The Next Generation* got very bumpy.

Things were especially fraught behind the scenes. The biggest challenge facing the series was that the engines of the show—the writers—were in a constant state of flux. By the end of Season 1, all of Roddenberry’s *Original Series* collaborators had left, a fact which is now largely attributed to the meddling of Leonard Maizlish, Roddenberry’s unscrupulous personal attorney, who forced out D.C. Fontana, Bob Justman and David Gerrold. Additionally, there were endless rewrites and squabbles over credits. And Roddenberry himself imposed strict rules about how

John de Lancie portrayed the all-powerful alien Q, who put the crew on trial for all the crimes of humanity in *TNG*’s first episode.







Left: Gates McFadden, who played Dr. Beverly Crusher, did not return for the second season of *TNG*.

Right: Whoopi Goldberg joined *TNG* in Season 2 as Guinan, the *Enterprise-D*'s affable bartender.



characters could speak and behave, which frustrated producer Maurice Hurley.

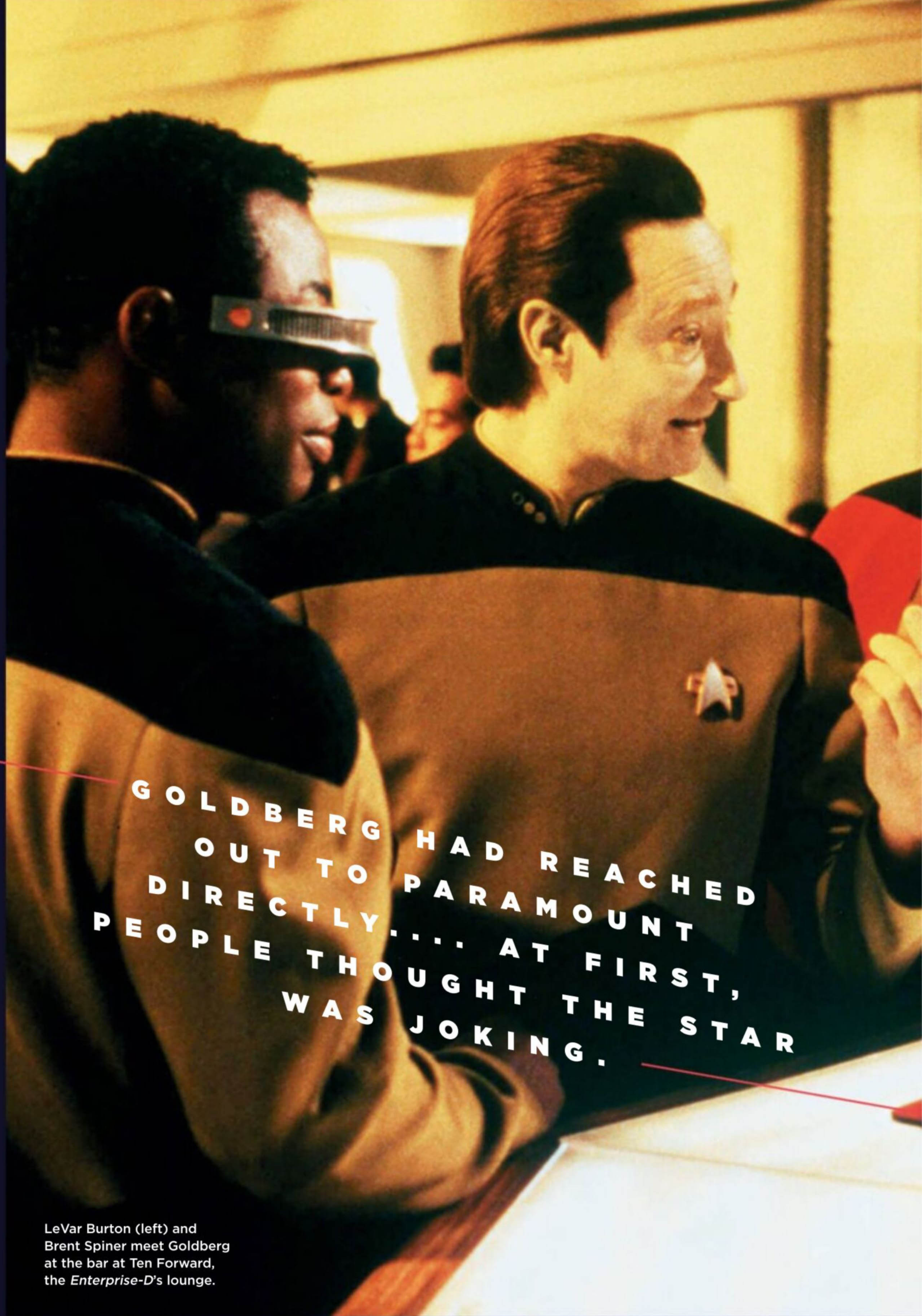
Hurley—the de facto showrunner—also locked horns with writer Tracy Tormé, who wrote the Season 1 episode “The Big Goodbye,” which won the coveted Peabody Award, a first for a science fiction TV series. The two disagreed on scripts to the point that after Hurley rewrites, Tormé asked that his name be taken off some episodes and a pseudonym be used instead.

Hurley also disliked working with Gates McFadden (Dr. Beverly Crusher), who did not return for Season 2 and was replaced by a new medical officer, Dr. Pulaski, played by Diana Muldaur. Also thrown off the *Enterprise* was Denise Crosby (Tasha Yar). Citing a lack of character development, Crosby requested that her character be written out in the divisive Season 1 episode “Skin of Evil.”

The plan for Season 2 was to “right the ship”—but then came the Writers Guild of America strike of

1988. Instead of a 26-episode run (like in Season 1), the second season had only 22 episodes, the last of which was an underwhelming entry called “Shades of Gray,” which took place largely in Riker’s mind and mostly comprised flashbacks to previous episodes.

The result was a strange and uneven season of television—but one that did advance *TNG* in a few notable ways. For one, Geordi La Forge became the permanent chief engineer of the *Enterprise-D*, a move that LeVar Burton felt allowed the series to explore new areas of an iconic vessel. Season 2 also saw the introduction of “Ten Forward”—the bar and lounge of the *Enterprise-D*. There, drinks and advice were dispensed by Whoopi Goldberg as Guinan, a centuries-old, wise and enigmatic bartender. In an interview with *Star Trek: The Official Fan Club* magazine in April 1991, Goldberg described the role as “a combination of myself [and] Yoda.” Because she’d been personally inspired as a child by Nichelle Nichols’ portrayal of Uhura in *The Original Series*,



GOLDBERG HAD REACHED
OUT TO PARAMOUNT
DIRECTLY.... AT FIRST,
PEOPLE THOUGHT THE STAR
WAS JOKING.

LeVar Burton (left) and
Brent Spiner meet Goldberg
at the bar at Ten Forward,
the *Enterprise-D*'s lounge.





Goldberg had reached out to Paramount directly to see if a role on *TNG* was available. At first, people thought the star was joking, but her persistence eventually prompted Roddenberry to create a role specifically for her. The name “Guinan” came from the real-life Prohibition-era speakeasy hostess, “Texas Guinan.”

Season 2 also introduced the Borg—a cybernetic, hive-mind alien menace—in the episode “Q Who.” Meanwhile, Picard fought for Data’s android rights in the classic courtroom episode “The Measure of a Man,” written by a former lawyer named Melinda Snodgrass. To this day, this episode is cited as one of the greatest moments in *The Next Generation* and is generally considered to be one of the best episodes in the *Star Trek* franchise, period. The episode also introduced what would become one of the most enduring elements of *TNG*—crew members playing poker together during off-hours, an idea that became

hugely symbolic throughout the series and lasted well into 2023, for the finale of *Star Trek: Picard*.

But, for many fans, the most important symbol of the evolution of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was Riker’s beard. In between Seasons 1 and 2, Jonathan Frakes grew out his facial hair—thrilling his character Will Riker, and the world. “The beard is an ancient and proud tradition,” Riker would later proclaim in “The Quality of Life” (Season 6, Episode 9). “I think it’s a sign of strength.”

And although Season 2 was far from perfect, Riker’s beard is generally considered the turning point for *TNG*, and the phrase “growing the beard” quickly entered pop culture vernacular as the *opposite* of “jumping the shark.” Instead of getting worse, the show was getting better. With this symbolic shift established, *The Next Generation* was finally ready to move more boldly than anyone had previously thought possible.

Left: The second season of *TNG* saw the introduction of the Borg, a cybernetic, hive-mind alien menace.

Right: Jonathan Frakes was clean-shaven as William T. Riker during the first season of *The Next Generation*.

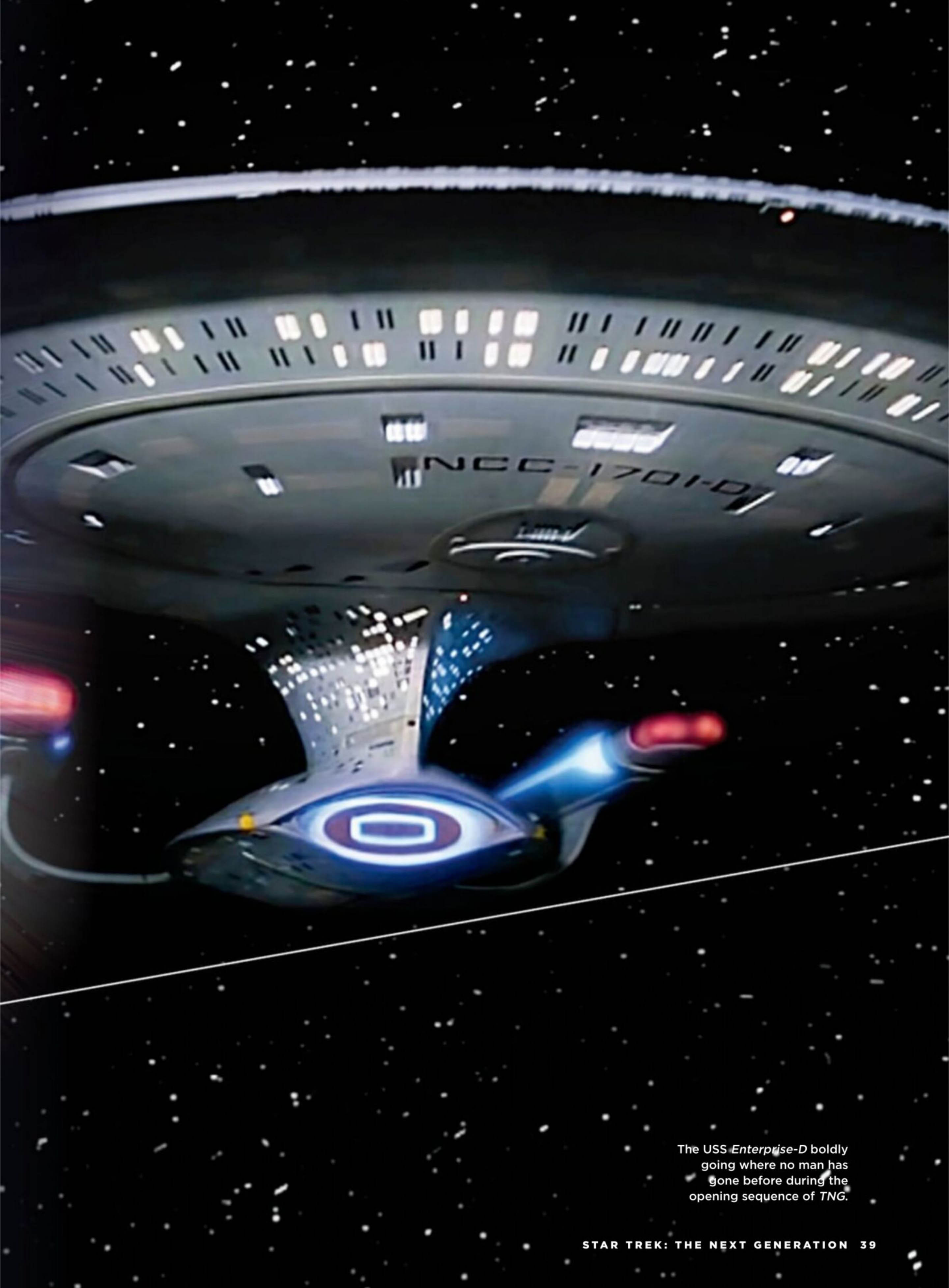
Below: Many *TSG* fans feel that the beard Frakes began wearing in Season 2 was the show's true turning point.



CHAPTER 4

WAR P SPEED

IN SEASON 3,
TNG BECAME THE SHOW
FANS LOVE



The USS *Enterprise-D* boldly going where no man has gone before during the opening sequence of *TNG*.



Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry (seated) celebrates *TNG*'s 100th episode with the show's producers and crew.

W

When *The Next Generation's* seven-season run is seen in perspective, what stands out most are not the sci-fi elements. What fans love are the characters.

In its first two seasons, *TNG* was an action series in keeping with other sci-fi shows of the era. But starting in Season 3, new producer Michael Piller and a fresh crop of writers refocused the narrative to move away from being just a weekly adventure.

As writer Ronald D. Moore explained in a 2013 *TNG* roundtable discussion, Piller would ask if each episode was “a Worf show” or a “Geordi show.” What he was saying was that the characters came first. With that new philosophy in place, *TNG* emerged as the series it would remain for the rest of its run.

In addition to making the show more focused on the regulars, Piller also instituted an open-door policy for script submissions, which meant that



CHAPTER 4



Left: LeVar Burton's Geordi La Forge was one of the characters on whom *TNG* focused more in Season 3.

Top right: *TNG* producers Brannon Braga (left) and Rick Berman celebrated the show's finale in 1994.

Bottom right: Writer Ronald D. Moore got his start when he submitted an unsolicited script to *TNG*.

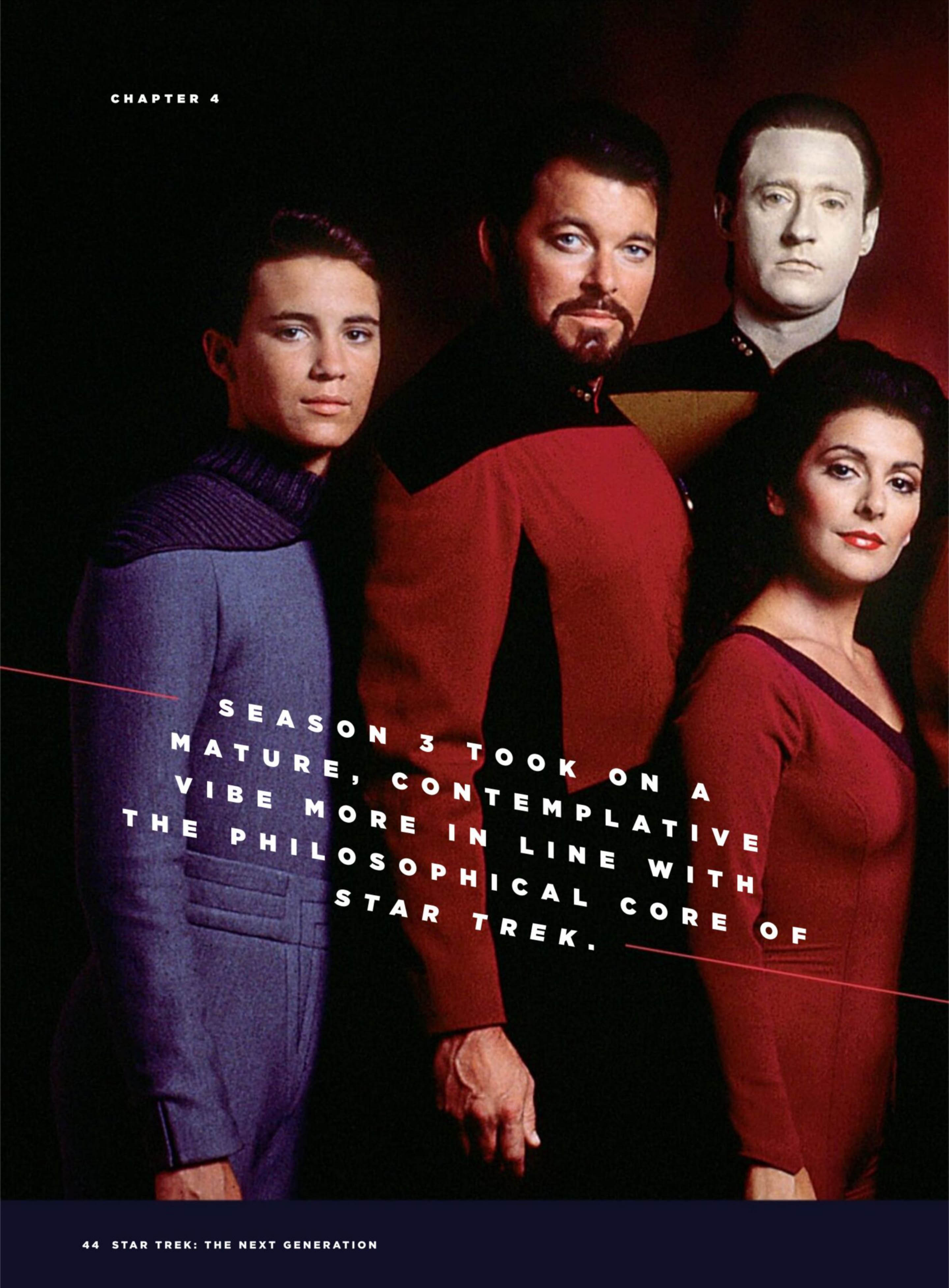
anyone—even those without a Hollywood agent or professional writing experience—could pitch ideas to *The Next Generation*.

This unprecedented move allowed *TNG* to crowdsource some of its best material. It also resulted in dream-come-true scenarios for writers like Moore. His spec script for “The Bonding”—which he’d given to a tour guide while visiting the *TNG* set—not only made it to air, it also led to Moore becoming a member of the show’s writing staff. Moore went on to team with Brannon Braga to write the scripts for two *TNG* films—*Generations* and *First Contact*—as well as the beloved *TNG* series finale, “All Good Things...”

Later, Moore worked extensively on the *Trek* spinoff *Deep Space Nine*. He is perhaps most famous for the rebooted *Battlestar Galactica* and historical drama series *Outlander*, as well as the contemporary Apple TV+ series *For All Mankind*. None of it would have happened easily—or at all—had *TNG* not started accepting scripts from outsiders.

As the writing jelled behind the scenes, Season 3 took on a mature, contemplative vibe more in line with the philosophical core of *Star Trek*—exactly what Gene Roddenberry had always envisioned. At the same time, the outward appearance of *TNG* changed, too. The costume designer for Seasons 1 and 2, Durinda Rice Wood, left the series and was replaced by Robert Blackman, who was immediately inundated with requests from the cast to redesign the Starfleet uniforms. This resulted in giving the uniforms collars, and generally making the look more





SEASON 3 TOOK ON A
MATURE, CONTEMPLATIVE
VIBE MORE IN LINE WITH
THE PHILOSOPHICAL CORE OF
STAR TREK.



The cast of *TNG*: (from left)
Wil Wheaton, Jonathan
Frakes, Brent Spiner, Marina
Sirtis, Patrick Stewart,
Michael Dorn, Gates
McFadden and Burton.



distinct to *The Next Generation* and less an offshoot of *The Original Series*.

The opening title sequence also was overhauled. What had been a simple view of the solar system in Seasons 1 and 2 was expanded by VFX supervisor Dan Curry and longtime *Trek* designer Michael Okuda to travel further into space. The intro was spruced-up with a blue space cloud, one which became so iconic it reappeared in 2023 at the start of the final episode of *Star Trek: Picard*, “The Last Generation.” Patrick Stewart’s narration remained the same, but the beauty and sense of wonder conveyed in the new opening sequence elevated the scope of *TNG* to a new, epic level.

And, after a letter-writing campaign from fans, Gates McFadden returned as Dr. Beverly Crusher, reuniting the core cast’s “big seven,” which consisted of McFadden, Stewart, Marina Sirtis, LeVar Burton, Michael Dorn, Jonathan Frakes and Brent Spiner.

Just when it felt like *TNG* had finally found its groove, fans were thrown for a shocking twist in the June 18, 1990, season finale: Capt. Jean-Luc Picard was assimilated by the hivemind of the Borg and turned into a cyborg enforcer called Locutus. With

Picard brainwashed and leading the *Enterprise*’s enemy, Riker has no choice but to attack the Borg Cube, with Picard on the ship.

To this day, “The Best of Both Worlds Part I,” is considered one of the greatest TV cliffhangers of all time. Behind the scenes, there was a brief moment where it was unclear to the other cast members whether or not Stewart *would* return, making the suspense of the moment all the more nail-biting in the real world.

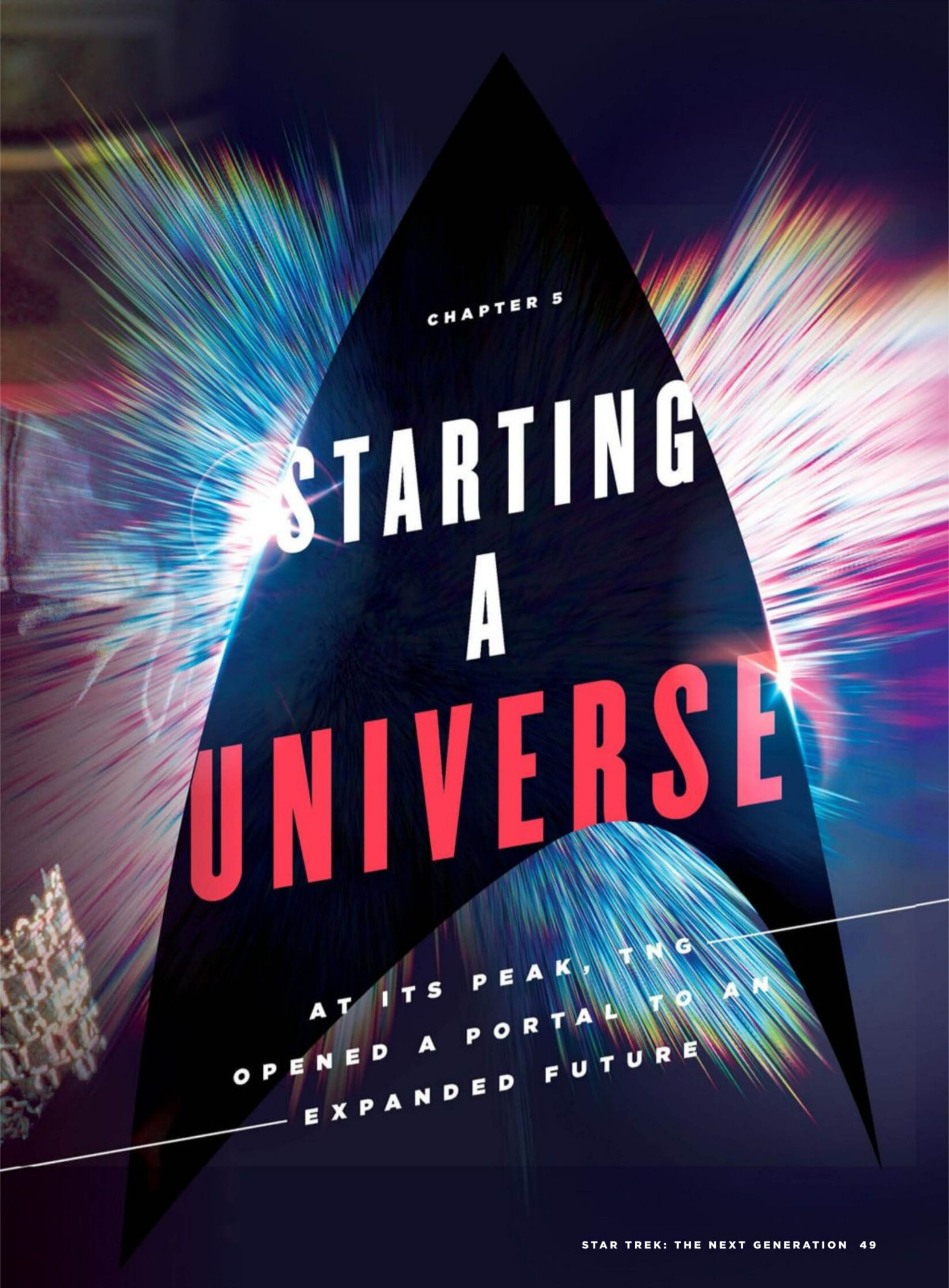
Above: The opening sequence, which was redone for Season 3, conveyed a more epic scope for *TNG*.

Right: Absent from the second season, McFadden returned for the third after outcry from *TNG* fans.



A battered Lieutenant Worf (Michael Dorn) mans the bridge during a battle scene in *The Next Generation*.





CHAPTER 5

STARTING A UNIVERSE

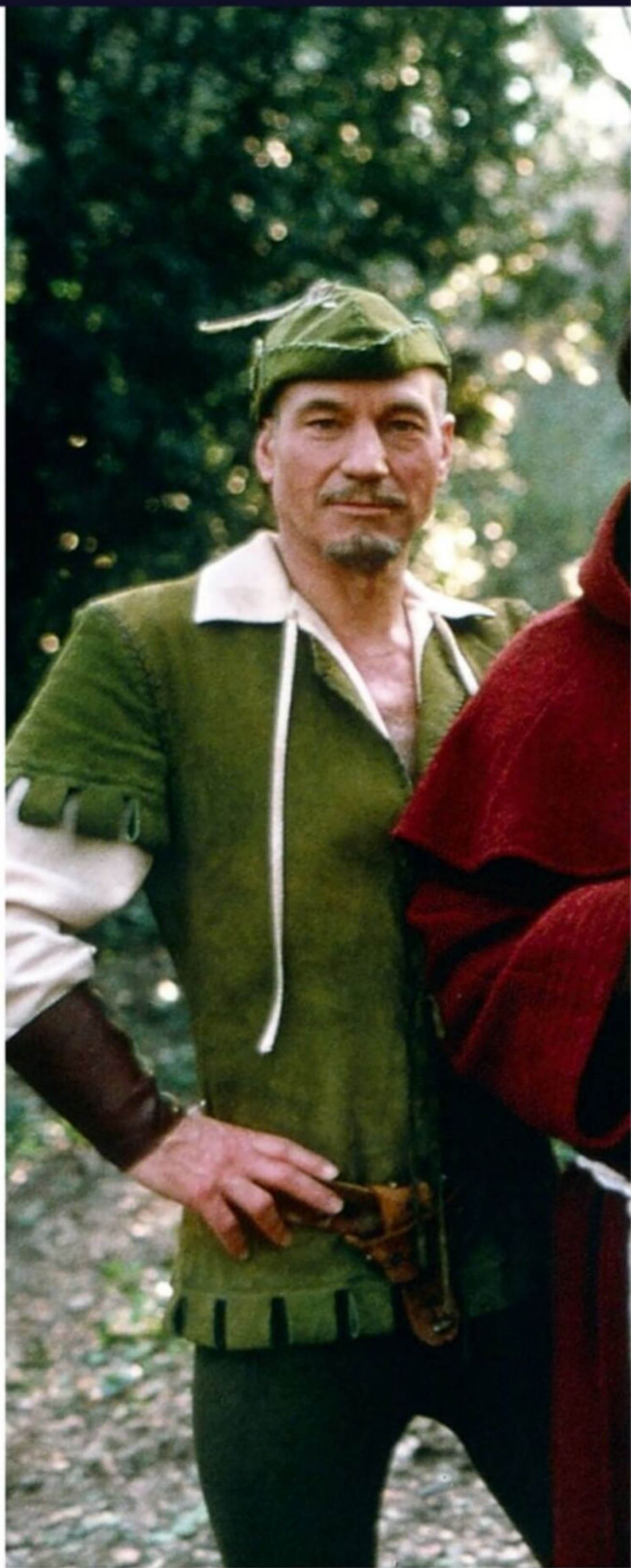
AT ITS PEAK, TNG
OPENED A PORTAL TO AN
EXPANDED FUTURE

O

On Sept. 24, 1990, “The Best of Both Worlds Part II” aired as the first episode of Season 4. Onscreen, Captain Picard is rescued from the Borg. Behind the scenes, *TNG* was about to enter its golden era.

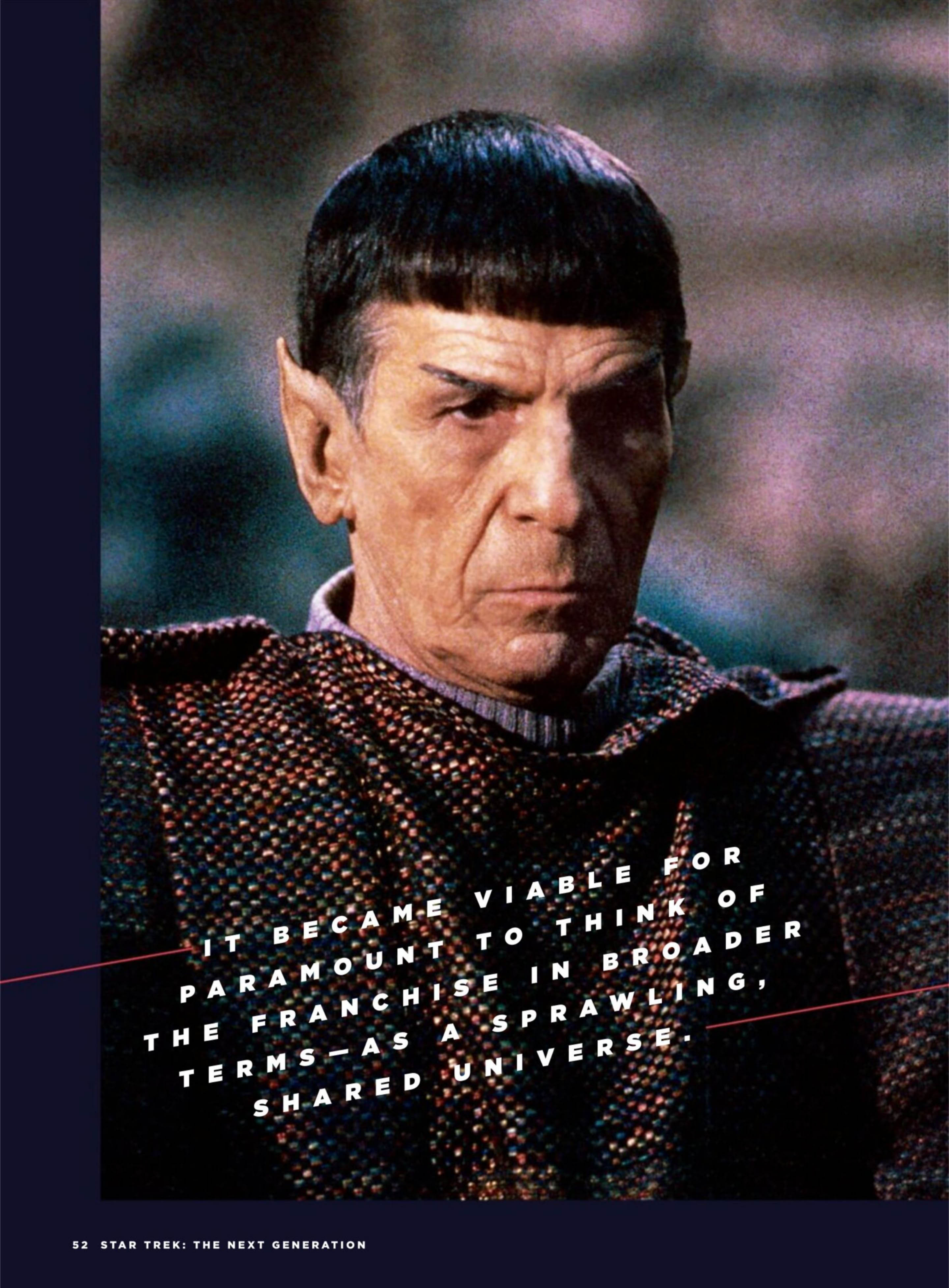
Seasons 4 and 5 of the show contain some of the most-loved episodes in any version of *Star Trek*, including standout favorites such as “The Inner Light,” “Data’s Day,” “Darmok” and “Ensign Ro,” which introduced the iconic character Ro Laren (Michelle Forbes).

And as *TNG* continued to improve and attract new fans, it propelled the popularity of *Star Trek* to the point where it became viable for Paramount to think of the franchise in broader terms—as a sprawling, shared universe. In 1991, the same year the original cast had their cinematic swan song in *Star Trek VI*:



Q sent the *TNG* crew to Sherwood Forest as Robin Hood and his Merry Men in the Season 4 episode "Qpid."





IT BECAME VIABLE FOR
PARAMOUNT TO THINK OF
THE FRANCHISE IN BROADER
TERMS—AS A SPRAWLING,
SHARED UNIVERSE.

Left: In 1991, Leonard Nimoy appeared as Spock on *TNG* in the two-part episode “Unification.”

Right: William Shatner portrayed Capt. James T. Kirk alongside Stewart (left) in 1994’s *Star Trek Generations*.



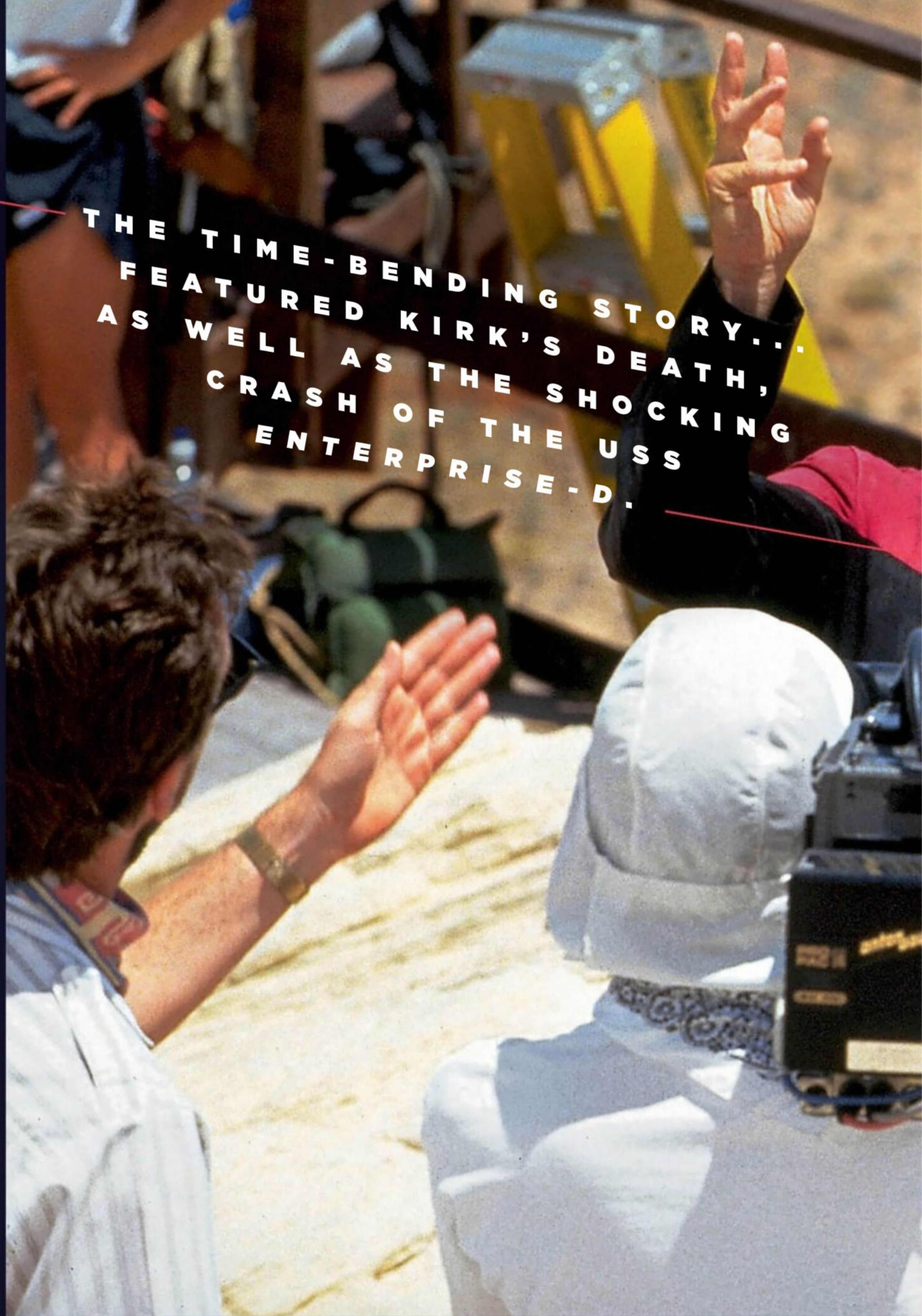
The Undiscovered Country, Leonard Nimoy also appeared on *The Next Generation* as Spock, in the two-part Season 5 episode “Unification.” When *The Undiscovered Country* reached theaters later that year, generations of *Trek* fans were united once again when Michael Dorn appeared onscreen as “Colonel Worf,” a Klingon ancestor of Lt. Worf from *TNG*. In Season 6 of *TNG*, James Doohan beamed over from *The Original Series*, reprising his role as Scotty in the 1992 episode “Relics,” which also found Capt. Picard and Scotty sharing a drink on a recreation of the classic bridge of the 1960s *Enterprise*.

Picard wasn’t done hanging out with crew members from *TOS*. In 1994, in *TNG*’s first feature film, Patrick Stewart’s Picard and William Shatner’s Kirk teamed up for *Star Trek Generations*. The time-bending story featured Kirk’s death, as well as the shocking crash of the USS *Enterprise-D*, the ship that had carried the *TNG* crew for seven seasons.

During the final two years of its television run, the immense success of *TNG* led to the creation of two spin-off TV series, both set in the same time period.

The first was *Deep Space Nine*, which debuted in 1993 and revisited events of “The Best of Both Worlds” in its premiere episode. The origin story of Cmdr. Benjamin Sisko (Avery Brooks) was directly connected to the moment when Picard had been assimilated by the Borg, and the USS *Enterprise* and Stewart appeared extensively in the two-hour premiere of *DS9*, an episode called “Emissary.” *TNG* fan-favorite Chief Miles O’Brien (Colm Meaney) left the *Enterprise* and became a series regular on *DS9*, along with his wife Keiko O’Brien (Rosalind Chao), who first appeared in the *TNG* episode “Data’s Day.” In 1995, Worf also became a regular character on *DS9*.

Deep Space Nine and *The Next Generation* ran concurrently for two seasons from 1993 to 1994—which covered the first two seasons of *DS9* and the last two of *TNG*. By 1995, after *TNG* had been off the air for a year, another series launched that was also set in the 24th century: *Star Trek: Voyager*. Picking up on plot threads that had begun on *TNG* and continued on *DS9*, the story of *Voyager* focused on a



THE TIME-BENDING STORY...
FEATURED KIRK'S DEATH,
AS WELL AS THE SHOCKING
CRASH OF THE USS
ENTERPRISE-D.



Stewart (center) and Shatner share a laugh together on the set of the 1994 film *Star Trek Generations*.



Starfleet crew forced to unite with renegades (known as the Masquis) on the far side of the galaxy. Led by Kate Mulgrew as Capt. Kathryn Janeway, *Voyager* was the first *Star Trek* series to feature a woman in the lead role, and at the time, launched the fledgling UPN network. Over time, several *TNG* characters would guest star on *Voyager*, including Dwight Schultz's Barclay, Marina Sirtis as Counselor Troi, and multiple appearances by John de Lancie's Q.

By 1996, the *TNG* crew made their second feature film outing with *Star Trek: First Contact*. The critically acclaimed movie was directed by Will Riker himself, Jonathan Frakes, who had previously directed several episodes of *The Next Generation*. In all the ways that matter, *First Contact* was like the '90s version of what the MCU is for movies today. It featured fan favorites from *TNG* battling the Borg once again, but also with links and references to the entire franchise up to that point. The plot itself

concerned time travel to the very first human warp flight with Zefram Cochrane (James Cromwell), rebooting a character who'd first appeared in the 1967 *TOS* episode "Metamorphosis." At the beginning of the film, Worf is in command of the USS *Defiant* from *Deep Space Nine*, while Robert Picardo's hologram from *Voyager* makes an appearance opposite Gates McFadden's Dr. Crusher.

Prior to the J.J. Abrams reboot in 2009, no other *Star Trek* film was as financially successful as *First Contact*, nor as critically acclaimed. In 2023, speaking to StarTrek.com, Frakes credited the success of *First Contact* to the impressive cast additions of Alfre Woodard, Alice Krige and James Cromwell. But he added that the best thing about the movie was the story, saying, "The script was bulletproof." And before they reunited for Season 3 of *Picard* in 2023, it was hard to argue that the *TNG* crew had ever shined as brightly as they had in *First Contact*.

Left: Kate Mulgrew (front row, center) portrayed Capt. Kathryn Janeway in the spin-off *Star Trek: Voyager*.

Right: Alfre Woodard (left) and James Cromwell appeared in the 1996 *TNG* film *Star Trek: First Contact*.

Below: Stewart with Alice Krige, who portrayed the Borg Queen (right) in *Star Trek: First Contact*.



CHAPTER 6

END OF AN ERA

IN THE EARLY 2000S, THE
FRANCHISE PREPARED TO REACH
ITS FINAL DESTINATION



Actor Jonathan Frakes (as William T. Riker) arms himself in the 2002 *TNG* film *Star Trek: Nemesis*.



The Next Generation's Paramount producers in L.A. in 1986: (from left) Rick Berman, John Ferraro and Peter S. Greenberg.



W

When fans think of *Star Trek* in the '90s, the truth is, that the era actually lasted for 18 years. From 1987 to 2005, four different *Trek* shows aired, consisting of a total of 624 episodes across 25 distinct seasons. What *The Next Generation* began in 1987 continued with the down-to-earth *Deep Space Nine*, traveled to the edge of space with *Voyager*, and, later, went back to basics with *Enterprise*, the prequel to *The Original Series*. After Gene Roddenberry's death in 1991 at age 70, all of these series were nominally overseen by Rick Berman, who also produced and had story input on the four *TNG* feature films from this era.

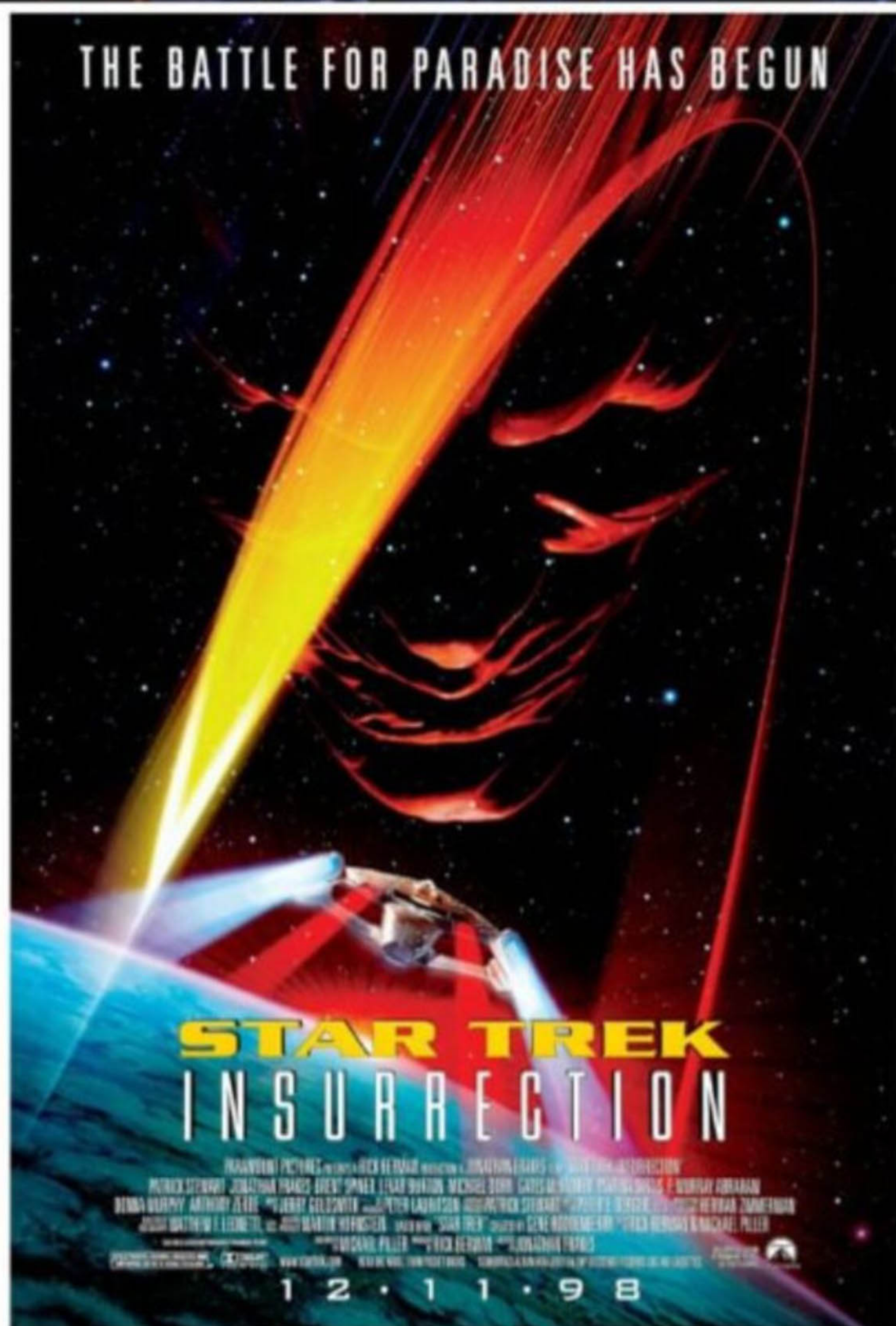
The fact that four different *Trek* television shows existed in a time period of less than 20 years was a staggering achievement. Today, even the ever-expanding Marvel TV universe can't come close to the sheer volume of *Trek*. And, like the Marvel



Top left: Scott Bakula, as Capt. Archer (right), with costar William Lucking in *Star Trek: Enterprise* in 2005.

Right: Bakula poses with the cast of the *TNG* spin-off series *Star Trek: Enterprise*, which ran from 2001 to '05.

Bottom left: The 1998 film *Star Trek: Insurrection* was the third to star the cast of *The Next Generation*.



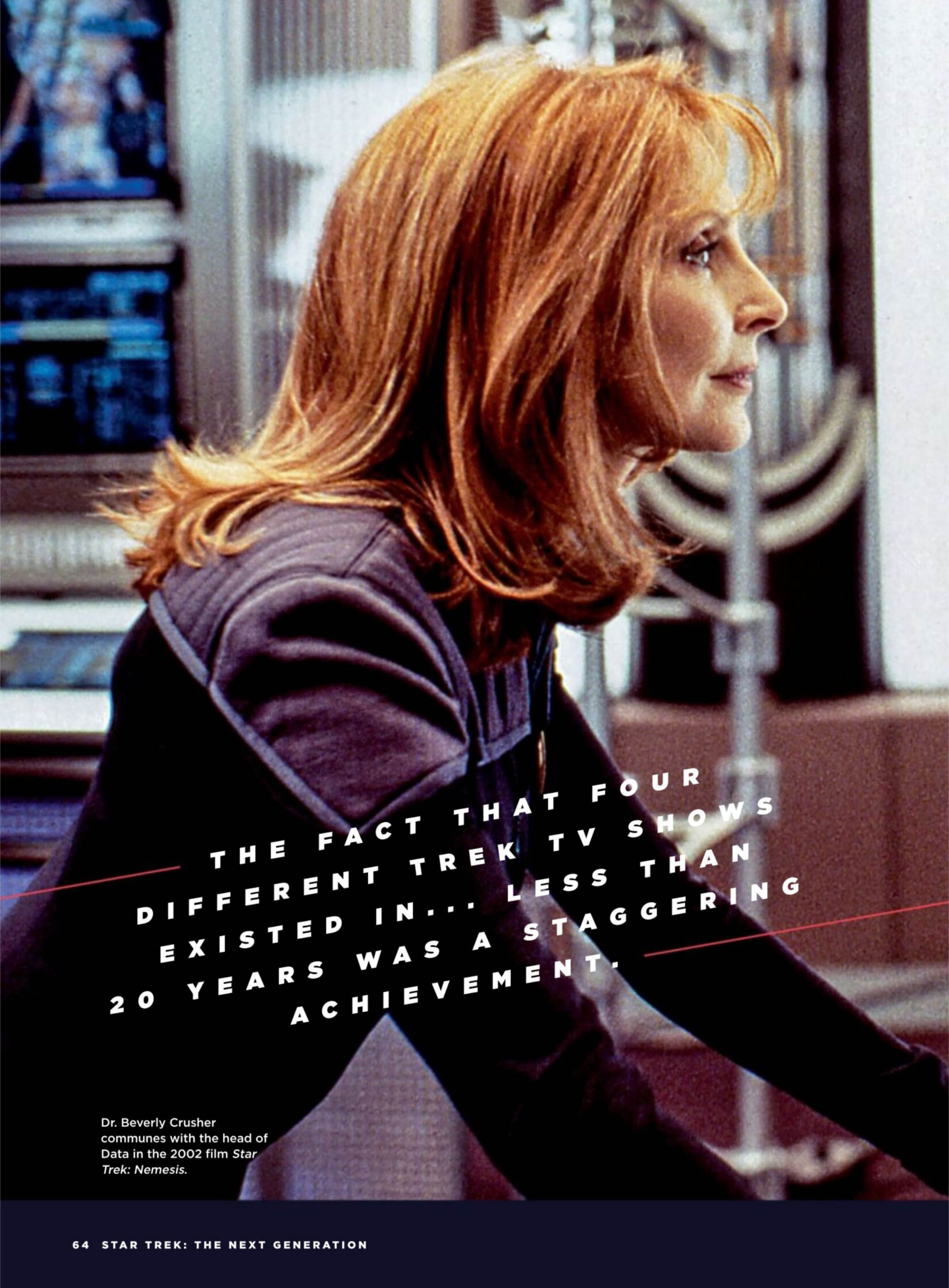
movies and shows of today, the *Trek* of this era was still aimed at a large, family audience. Despite its reputation for being a niche—and, yes, geeky—show, *TNG* made the *Trek* brand into one of the most mainstream TV concepts of all time.

That is, until it stopped. By the early 2000s, the ratings for new *Trek* shows had started to slip. While *TNG* had boasted 20 million viewers a week at the height of its popularity, the waning years of the spinoff shows never reached such heights. And, while the *Enterprise* premiere pulled in 12 million viewers on Sept. 26, 2001, that series paled in ratings performance compared to *TNG*.

At the box office, the *TNG* film franchise sputtered after the triumph of *First Contact*. When 1998's *Star Trek: Insurrection* found the *TNG* crew sticking up for the rights of a small group of people on a small planet nobody had heard of, it may have been in line with the kinds of stories *TNG* told so well on the small screen. As a film, it lacked vitality. And although *Insurrection* earned a respectable \$117 million at the global box office, reviews were mixed. Furthermore, *Insurrection*'s domestic earnings of \$70 million were only good enough to match the budget for making the film—which, by Hollywood studio standards, was not good enough to call it a success.

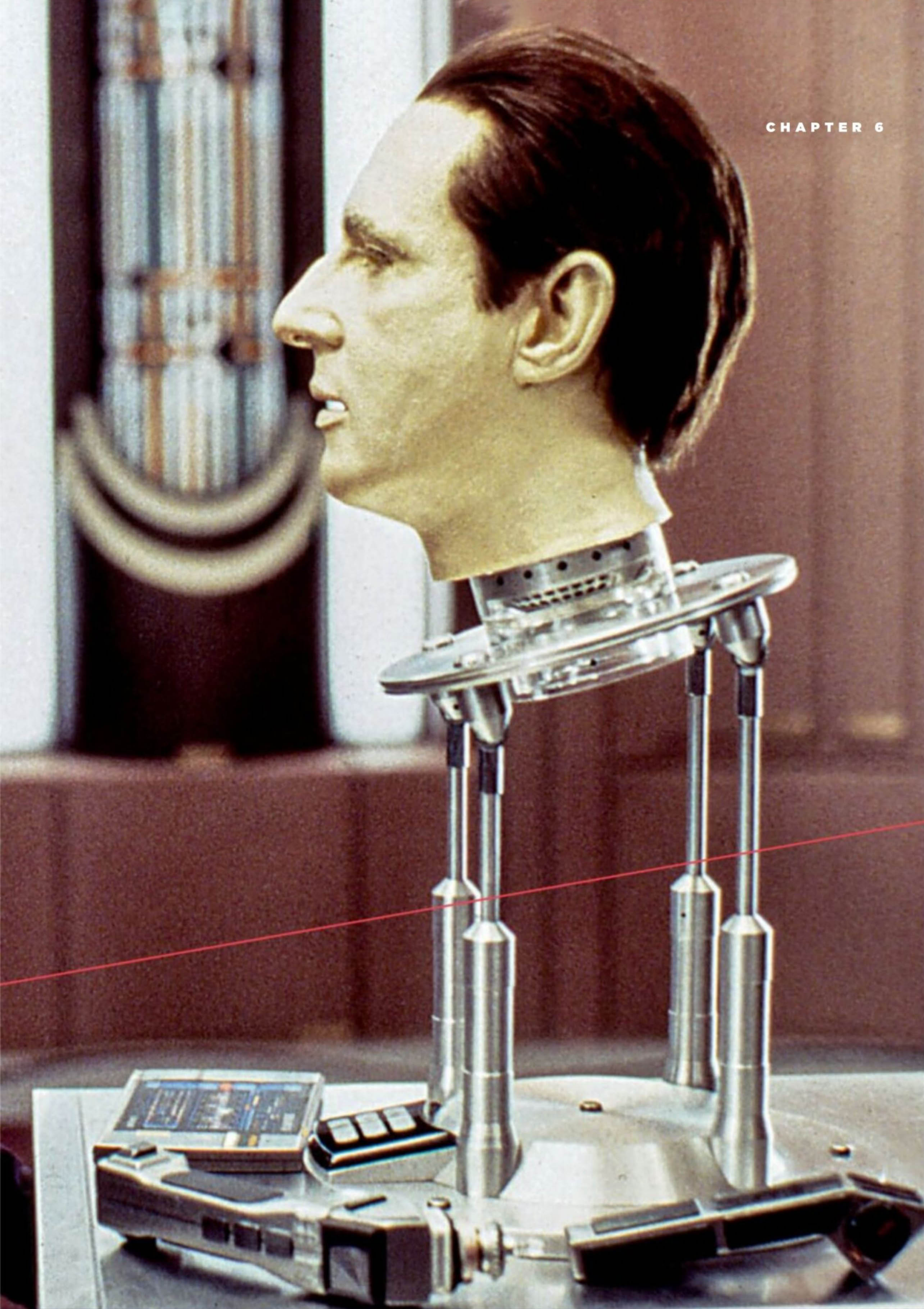
By 2002, with ratings for the prequel series *Enterprise* declining, the fourth and final *TNG*





THE FACT THAT FOUR
DIFFERENT TREK TV SHOWS
EXISTED IN... LESS THAN
20 YEARS WAS A STAGGERING
ACHIEVEMENT.

Dr. Beverly Crusher
communes with the head of
Data in the 2002 film *Star
Trek: Nemesis*.



CHAPTER 6



Top left: Patrick Stewart (left) with Tom Hardy at the 2002 premiere of *Star Trek: Nemesis* in London.

Bottom left: Hardy as a younger clone of Picard in *Star Trek: Nemesis*, the final film with the *TNG* cast.

Right: Actor Ron Perlman in full makeup as a Reman Viceroy in the 2002 film *Star Trek: Nemesis*.



feature—*Star Trek: Nemesis*—reached theaters. This movie featured a complex performance from Tom Hardy as a younger clone of Jean-Luc Picard, and excellent work from the cast overall, but *Nemesis* was generally regarded as a muddled film that didn't capture the true spirit of *Star Trek*. In his 2002 review, Roger Ebert said that the franchise had “run out of gas,” and that *Nemesis* was “a copy of a copy.”

Later, many of the cast would complain that director Stuart Baird had been too unfamiliar with *Trek* to make the movie work. The film also ended with the death of Data, one of the most popular sci-fi characters of all time, and unlike Spock in the '80s, Data wouldn't be resurrected for several decades.

For better or worse, for nearly 20 years, *Nemesis* marked the final appearance of the entire *TNG* crew working together. When *Enterprise* ended its four-season run in 2005, the entire finale was framed inside a holographic simulation within a *TNG* episode. Jonathan Frakes and Marina Sirtis returned as Riker and Troi to mark the end of 18 years of *Star Trek* on television. The moment felt bittersweet to many fans—not just because things were ending, but because it recalled just how great *TNG* had been and how underwhelming the franchise's final years were as a whole.

Star Trek delivered so much hope, wisdom and sheer entertainment to so many people for so many years that the ending seemed anticlimactic. Fans wanted more—that old feeling of a voyage boldly going *somewhere*.





Zachary Quinto plays Spock in the 2013 film *Star Trek Into Darkness*, the sequel to the 2009 reboot, *Star Trek*.

CHAPTER 7

THE NEW STANDARD

THE LEGACY OF
TNG HAS HAD A LASTING IMPACT
ON ALL OF SCI-FI

Grace Park (left) and Tahmoh Penikett starred in the reimagined sci-fi series *Battlestar Galactica*.

In the years after such *Star Wars*-inspired shows as the original *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* left the air, and before *Star Trek: The Next Generation* arrived, there wasn't much in the way of sci-fi on American television—or even at the movies. But thanks to the success of *TNG* and its various franchise spin-offs, by the end of the 1990s, science fiction and fantasy had become more mainstream than ever before.

One specific example of how *TNG* influenced the next wave of sci-fi TV was in the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica*, cocreated by David Eick and *Next Generation* veteran Ronald D. Moore. Although the tone of the series was much darker, the ensemble cast and overall humanist message at the core of the show seemed like a mature outgrowth of *TNG*. In a





Top left: David Strathairn had a recurring role as Cmdr. Klaes Ashford in the sci-fi series *The Expanse*.

Bottom left: Longtime *TNG* producer Brannon Braga worked with a few *Trek* alums on the series *Terra Nova*.

Right: *TNG* fan Seth MacFarlane cocreated and starred in the comedy-drama series *The Orville*.

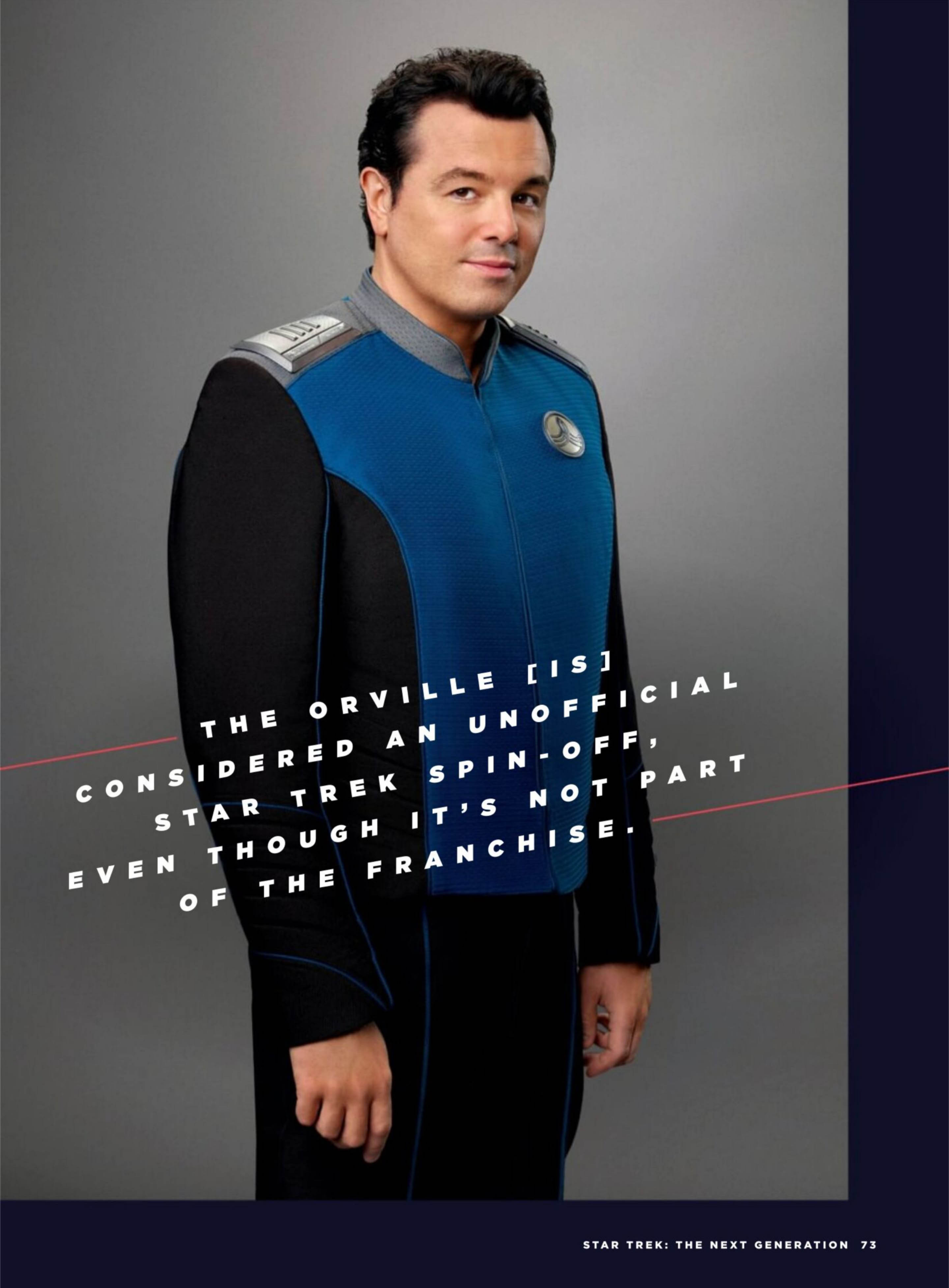


few of his podcast commentaries, Moore even slipped up and called Cmdr. Adama (Edward James Olmos) “Picard” by mistake.

Several other *TNG* alums also went on to create notable genre series. Writer and science consultant Naren Shankar became the showrunner of *The Expanse*, the popular series based on the novels by Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck. Meanwhile, Moore’s old writing partner and longtime *Trek* producer Brannon Braga worked on the time travel-meets-dinosaurs series *Terra Nova*, which reteamed him briefly with *TNG* and *DS9* writer René Echevarria, as well as his former assistant on *Enterprise* and *Voyager*, Terry Matalas—who eventually returned to become showrunner for Seasons 2 and 3 of *Picard*.

In 2016, Braga was also a producer on Seth MacFarlane’s cult science-fiction hit, *The Orville*. As an unabashed love letter to *TNG*, Braga and MacFarlane frequently recruited several former *Trek* talents—including tapping Jonathan Frakes to direct two episodes—all of which led *The Orville* to be considered an unofficial *Star Trek* spin-off, even though it’s not technically part of the franchise.

Feature films in the 21st century have also been influenced by *TNG*—and many of them have been



THE ORVILLE [IS]
CONSIDERED AN UNOFFICIAL
STAR TREK SPIN-OFF,
EVEN THOUGH IT'S NOT PART
OF THE FRANCHISE.

CHAPTER 7

Scott Grimes as Gordon Malloy (left) and Peter Macon as Bortus, in a scene from *The Orville*.

THANKS TO THE SUCCESS
OF TNG... SCIENCE FICTION
AND FANTASY HAD
BECOME MORE MAINSTREAM
THAN EVER BEFORE.





Above: Quinto as Spock in the 2013 film, *Star Trek Into Darkness*, the 12th film in the franchise.

Near right: Director J.J. Abrams with costumed actor Deep Roy on the set of *Star Trek Into Darkness*.

Opposite page: Chris Pine portrayed Capt. James T. Kirk in both *Into Darkness* and 2009's *Star Trek*.



massive hits. Kevin Feige, the president of Marvel Studios, is a self-described *TNG* megafan. In 2018, Feige told *Entertainment Weekly* that he considers “All Good Things...” to be “one of the best series finales ever.” In the same interview, he revealed that in working on the *Avengers* films he “talks about [*The Next Generation*] all the time.” For *TNG* fans the vibe becomes obvious when watching *Infinity War* or *Endgame*. The camaraderie and sense of family between the characters in the Marvel Cinematic Universe very much echoes the relationships among the crew members of the USS *Enterprise-D*.

After *Enterprise* ended as a pseudo *TNG* episode in 2005, the next new *Star Trek* film in 2009 relaunched the franchise. Directed by J.J. Abrams, this movie—simply titled *Star Trek*—brought everything full circle and rebooted the characters from *The Original Series*, including Capt. Kirk, Spock, Uhura, Bones, Scotty, Chekov and Sulu.

The film was a hit and some interpreted its success as proof that the ’60s characters were still better than the *Next Generation* crew.

But the basic premise of the 2009 *Star Trek* reboot relied on a time travel plot that *begins* in the late 24th century. As played by Leonard Nimoy, the older version of Spock has close connections with the Romulans because of what had been established on *Next Generation* in 1991. Even when *TNG* wasn’t “on-screen,” it was still influencing the future of the franchise.

All of this from a sequel series that even its captain, Patrick Stewart, didn’t think would work. As he explained to *CBS Mornings*, before taking the role of Picard, Stewart “talked to a handful of people whom I knew and they all said, ‘Look. You can’t revive an iconic show like *Star Trek*. You’re probably not making it through the first season.’”

How wrong they all were.



CHAPTER 8

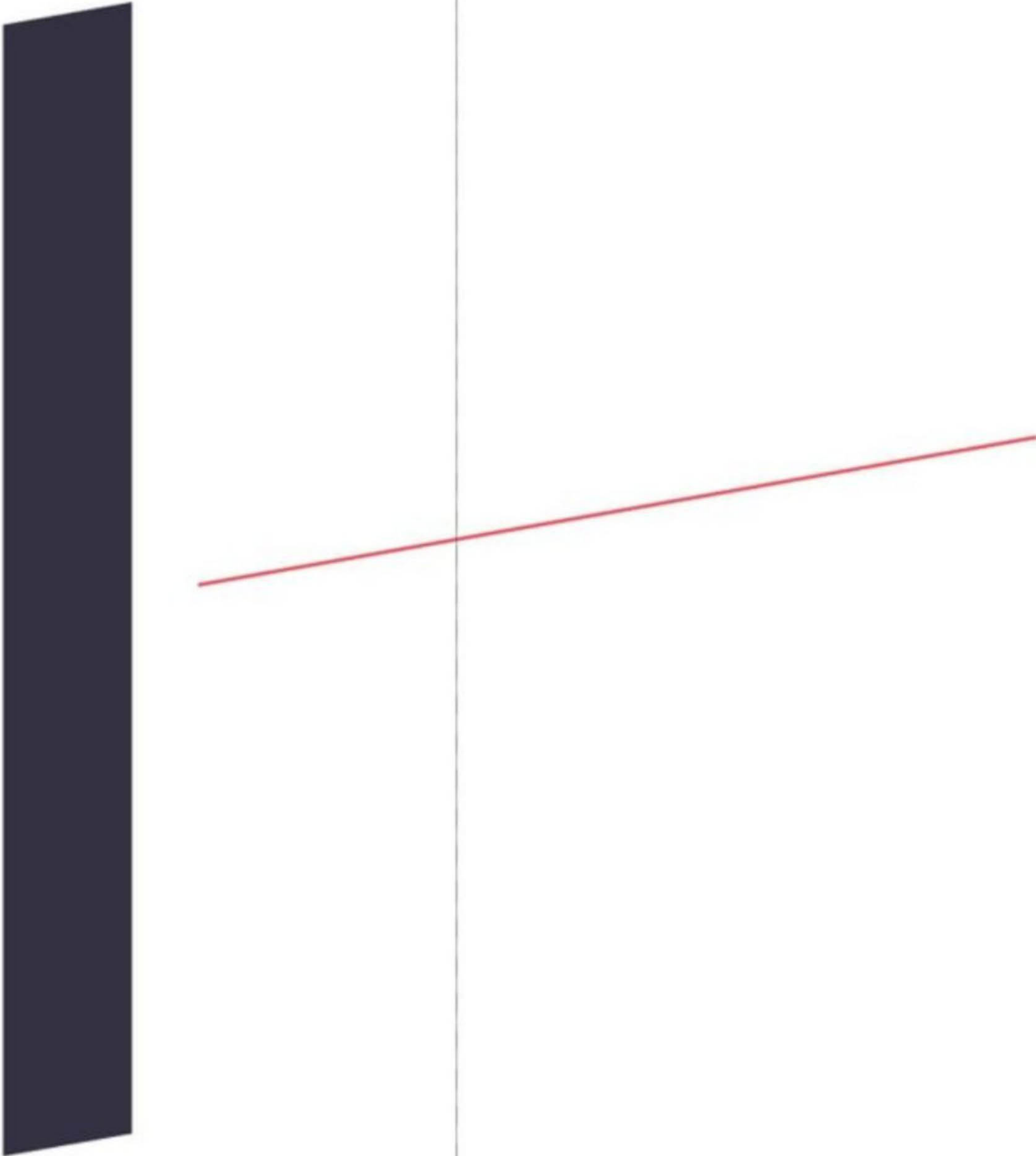
CALL IT A COMEBACK

— HOW TNG NOSTALGIA
EVENTUALLY RESULTED IN AN
ACTUAL RETURN —



In 2020, Patrick Stewart returned to his most famous role for the *Star Trek* series *Picard*.





In 2017, the *Trek* franchise came back to television in the form of *Star Trek: Discovery*. For Jonathan Frakes, it was history repeating itself. As a director working on *Discovery* behind the scenes, Frakes was close to the cast and sympathetic to the new show's rocky beginning.

"It's the same thing," he told *Inverse* in 2018. "We went through what they're going through." Sure enough, *Discovery* eventually found its footing with its popular Season 2 finale—"Such Sweet Sorrow"—and Frakes went on to direct some of the most popular episodes of the show. Even though the format, time period and tone of *Discovery* were very different from *TNG*, '90s *Trek* gradually started to influence the new shows more and more. In 2020, the franchise launched two new television series, both of which were, essentially, direct sequels to *The Next Generation*.

Gates McFadden (left) and Jonathan Frakes attend the premiere of the series *Star Trek: Discovery* in 2017.



Left: In *Star Trek: Picard*, Stewart plays a man drawn out of retirement and into a new adventure.

Top right: Brent Spiner, who played Data on *TNG*, returned to the extended *Star Trek* universe in *Picard*.

Bottom right: Jeri Ryan, who played former Borg Seven of Nine on *Voyager*, reprised her role on *Picard*.

Star Trek: Picard Season 1—cocreated by Alex Kurtzman and Akiva Goldsman, as well as *Voyager* novelist Kirsten Beyer and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon—picked up 20 years after the events of *Star Trek: Nemesis* and focused on retired Admiral Picard (Patrick Stewart), who is drawn into a galaxy-wide mystery involving the Romulans, former ex-Borg and a massive android conspiracy. Although the critical reception for *Picard* Season 1 was positive, fan reaction was somewhat mixed. The show presented a darker version of the Federation from what had last been seen in 2002, and for some, the ending of the season felt rushed. Still, *Picard* Season 1 reunited Stewart with Brent Spiner, Jonathan Frakes and Marina Sirtis. Jonathan Del Arco, who played a Borg named Hugh in the classic *TNG* episode “I, Borg,” also returned, as did Jeri Ryan, who reprised her role as Seven of Nine from *Star Trek: Voyager*.

The same year, the animated adult comedy series *Star Trek: Lower Decks* launched. The creator of *Lower Decks*, Mike McMahan, was well known in animation circles for his work on *Rick and Morty*, but, before that, in 2011, he created the parody Twitter account “*TNG* Season 8.” There, McMahan posted hilarious synopses of *TNG* episodes that didn’t exist. This tongue-in-cheek approach to the canon of *The*



CHAPTER 8



The cast of *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* poses together at the show's New York premiere on April 30, 2022.

STRANGE NEW WORLDS

Paramount
ORIGINAL





Top left: The animated series *Star Trek: Lower Decks* is seen as a worthy sequel to *The Next Generation*.

Bottom left: Actors Ethan Peck (right) and Celia Rose Gooding in a still from *Strange New Worlds*.

Right: In *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*, actor Anson Mount portrays Capt. Christopher Pike.



Next Generation directly led to the creation of *Lower Decks*, which takes its title from the Season 7 *TNG* episode of the same name. Set just a few years after *Nemesis*, *Lower Decks*, was in many ways, an even closer sequel to *TNG* than the first season of *Picard*.

Lower Decks was also the first of the new *Star Trek* series to return to a self-contained episodic format. In 2020, during Virtual Trek Con, McMahan said he “lives and breathes *TNG*,” which is why *Lower Decks* evokes the overall vibe of that era, albeit with an animated sitcom spin. *Lower Decks* used the *TNG* font for on-screen credits and brought back the tradition of displaying episode titles on-screen as each story begins. By the end of Season 3 in 2022, several notable *TNG* actors had guest-starred including Jonathan Frakes, John de Lancie, Alice Krige, James Cromwell and Marina Sirtis.

In 2022, the live-action original series-prequel *Strange New Worlds* also adopted a self-contained episodic format, which, of course, referenced the ’60s show. And even though *Strange New Worlds* was set slightly before the era of *TOS*—complete with a pre-Kirk Capt. Pike—aspects of the show were actually more similar to *TNG* in tone and style.

But for all the *TNG* DNA in *Lower Decks*, *Strange New Worlds*, and Seasons 1 and 2 of *Picard*, this was *nothing* compared to what happened in 2023 with *Picard* Season 3. Suddenly, *The Next Generation* was back in the most overt—and emotionally moving—ways possible.



IN 2020, THE FRANCHISE
LAUNCHED TWO NEW TV
SERIES, BOTH OF
WHICH WERE, ESSENTIALLY...
SEQUELS TO TNG.



The third and final season of *Star Trek: Picard* became a love letter to the cast and legacy of *TNG*.

CHAPTER 9

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

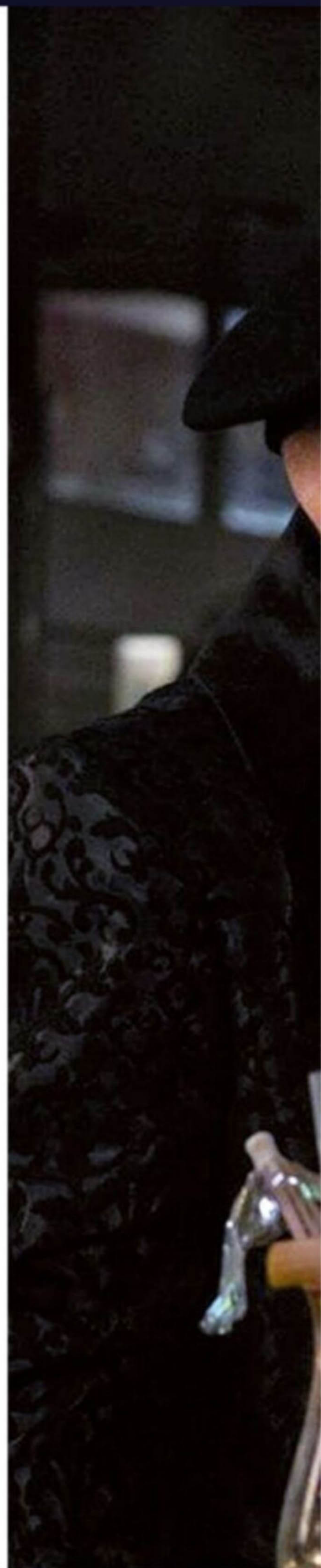
WAS PICARD SEASON 3
THE END FOR THE
CREW—AND FANS—OF TNG?

A

Picard (Patrick Stewart) giving advice to Seven of Nine (Jeri Ryan, right) in a scene from *Star Trek: Picard*.

As Season 2 of *Star Trek: Picard* was midway through production in 2021, co-showrunner Terry Matalas hatched an ambitious plan for Season 3. What if the final season of *Picard* did double duty as one more *Next Generation* adventure? Matalas pitched a 10-episode miniseries that would reunite all seven major cast members of *TNG* while also serving as a true ending to the story of the crew of the *Enterprise-D*. And this time, unlike in *Nemesis*, none of the beloved characters would die.

In 2023, Matalas told *Inverse*, “In a weird way, I wanted the surprise ending to be that it was a happy ending.” Love for *TNG* went into maximum warp in the final two episodes of the season, as it’s revealed that Geordi La Forge (LeVar Burton) has restored the USS *Enterprise-D* in secret. In real life,







THE PLOT OF THE THIRD
SEASON OF PICARD
WASN'T JUST ABOUT OLD
TIMES FOR THE SAKE
OF NOSTALGIA.

Left: Ashlei Sharpe Chestnut (center) with LeVar Burton and his daughter, Mica Burton, in 2023.

Below: Ed Speleers plays Jack Crusher, the son of Picard and Beverly Crusher, in Season 3 of *Picard*.

the design team of *Picard*—including Dave Blass, Michael Okuda and Liz Kloczkowski—had the classic *TNG* bridge rebuilt from scratch. No CGI trickery was used for these scenes, and in a sweet touch, the dedication plaque for the ship was the same prop used in the series from 1987 to 1994.

The plot of the third season of *Picard* wasn't just about old times for the sake of nostalgia. The overarching story focuses on how much the *TNG* crew needs one another and explores what it means for one generation to step aside for the next.

Rising star Ed Speleers made his *Trek* debut as Jack Crusher, the son of Beverly Crusher and Jean-Luc Picard, who has to face his darkest (Borg) demons to survive. Geordi La Forge's daughters are also central to the story: Ashlei Sharpe Chestnut plays Sidney La Forge, the pilot of the USS *Titan*, while Burton's real-life daughter, Mica Burton, plays Alandra La Forge, who has secretly been restoring the *Enterprise* along with her dad.





Stewart (fifth from left) with his fellow cast members from *Picard* at the show's Season 3 premiere in Los Angeles on Feb. 9, 2023.





In 2023, Burton told *Fatherly* that the real-life bridging of the generations in *Picard* Season 3 was personally profound. “It still makes me emotional to think about it, because it’s deeply satisfying on so many levels as a professional actor, as a father and as a *Star Trek* fan,” he said. “It hits on all of those touchstones in my life.”

In many ways, the finale of Season 3 punctuated the lasting legacy of *The Next Generation*. In 1987, it connected the past and future of science fiction as imagined by Gene Roddenberry—and in 2023, this still held true.

The only question that remains is, what’s next? *Star Trek: Picard* was largely billed as the final voyage of *TNG*, and the final episode is very clearly

called “The Last Generation.” On-screen, Geordi, Picard and Riker put the *Enterprise-D* in the Fleet Museum and turn off the lights. A new show *might* continue with Capt. Seven (Jeri Ryan) on the newly christened *Enterprise-G* with Jack and Sidney, but for now, plans for what Matalas calls “Star Trek: Legacy” are just hypothetical. And even if a new spin-off does materialize, it feels unlikely that the *TNG* cast will ever be reunited like this again.

As for the fans, they are the ones with the power to decide *Trek*’s fate, just as it’s always been. If they want another series, movie or even for the *TNG* crew to reunite again in part or whole, well... the creators will more than likely—as Picard himself would say—“Make it so.”

Left: Jonathan Frakes directed two episodes during the final season of *Star Trek: Picard*.

Right: *TNG* alum Wil Wheaton at the Season 3 premiere of *Picard* with his wife, Anne Wheaton, in 2023.

Below: Stewart speaks to the crowd at the Season 3 premiere of *Picard* in Los Angeles on Feb. 9, 2023.



STAR TREK

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